

## CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCES

Modie Christon Smith

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Approved by:

William G. Lycan

Ram Neta

John T. Roberts

Matthew Kotzen

Alan Nelson

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## **ABSTRACT**

MODIE CHRISTON SMITH: Conceptual Experiences  
(Under the direction of William G. Lycan and Ram Neta)

Beliefs are mental states with representational contents. For example, the belief that fish swim has the content that fish swim. Many philosophers find it natural to describe the contents of beliefs as “conceptual.” In the case of the belief that fish swim, it is impossible to hold this belief without possessing the concepts FISH and SWIM, and the belief in some sense “uses” or “exercises” these concepts. Perceptual experiences are another type of mental state. Most contemporary philosophers understand experiences to be mental states of a type that is common to perception, dreaming, and hallucination; and most contemporary philosophers also hold that experiences, like beliefs, have contents. However, most contemporary philosophers deny that experiential contents are conceptual like belief contents. The prevailing view is “non-conceptualism” about experiential contents. The arguments for non-conceptualism are many, but the two most prominent ones are the “animal-infant” argument, appealing to the conceptual impoverishment of non-human perceivers and human infant perceivers, and the “fineness-of-grain” argument, appealing to the determinacy of detail represented by our experiences. Those few contemporary philosophers who defend “conceptualism” about experiential contents—the view that experiential contents are conceptual like belief contents—typically try to support it with epistemological arguments concerning the justification of empirical beliefs by experiences. In this dissertation I defend conceptualism. My defense is very limited. I reply to three

arguments for non-conceptualism—the animal-infant argument, the fineness-of-grain argument, and a third argument appealing to concept learning—but there are many more that I do not even address. I also criticize epistemological arguments for conceptualism and present what I believe to be a promising non-epistemological argument for conceptualism, though I acknowledge that my argument needs more development than I can presently provide. My aim is not so much to convince my reader to believe conceptualism, as to convince him or her to take it more seriously than most philosophers currently do. At the same time, I hope to establish a foundation on which I or other future conceptualists might build in rebutting all the arguments for non-conceptualism and developing a convincing argument for conceptualism.

To my parents

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## INTRODUCTION

Beliefs are mental states with representational contents. A belief says something, or represents the world as being a certain way; and what the belief says, or the way it represents the world as being, is its content. The belief that fish swim says that fish swim, it represents the world as being a world in which fish swim, and its content is that fish swim. Beliefs can be true or false, and they have truth conditions defined by their contents. The belief that fish swim is true if and only if fish swim. Many philosophers find it natural to describe the contents of beliefs as “conceptual.” It is impossible to believe that fish swim without possessing the concepts FISH and SWIM, and the belief in some sense “uses” or “exercises” these concepts.

Perceptual experiences are another type of mental state. Experiences are what René Descartes is introspecting and describing in the following passage from the “Second Meditation”:

... I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false....<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, philosophers have understood experiences to be mental states of a type that is common to perception, dreaming, and hallucination. Some contemporary philosophers reject this traditional understanding, but most still accept it.

Most contemporary philosophers hold that experiences, like beliefs, have contents. An experience says something, or represents the world as being a certain way. And what the experience says, or the way it represents the world as being, is its content. While it is easy to

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<sup>1</sup> Descartes 1642, p. 19, italics in original.

give straightforward, illustrative examples of belief contents, it is impossible to do the same for experiential contents. The reason is a grammatical difference between the words “belief” and “experience.” We naturally speak of the belief that P, but we do not naturally speak of the experience that P. Experiences are not “experiences that” but “experiences of,” or, if we wish to emphasize the possibility of non-veridical experiences, “experiences as of.” It is natural to speak of an experience of a red round tomato, or, if we wish to emphasize the possibility that the experience is non-veridical, an experience as of a red round tomato. The content of the belief that fish swim is that fish swim. But what is the content of an experience of a red round tomato? That there is a red round tomato? That there is a red round tomato before the subject? Is it even appropriate to try to specify the content with an expression of the form “that P”? And wouldn’t the experience represent much more than the tomato, such as the background behind it? Why is it natural to speak of *the* belief that fish swim when invoking it as a generic example of a belief, but to speak of *an* experience of a red round tomato when invoking it as a generic example of an experience? These are the questions we find ourselves mired in whenever we try to give a straightforward, illustrative example of an experiential content. Nevertheless, most contemporary philosophers hold that experiences, like beliefs, have contents. The reason is that experiences can be accurate or inaccurate, and they have accuracy conditions. It is easy to imagine an accurate experience of a red round tomato (someone seeing such a tomato under normal circumstances) and an inaccurate experience of a red round tomato (someone dreaming of such a tomato while asleep in a sealed room containing no tomatoes). Since the truth conditions of beliefs are defined by their contents, it is natural to suppose that the accuracy conditions of experiences are defined by their contents and, *ipso facto*, that experiences have contents.

Are experiential contents conceptual like belief contents? Most philosophers who have addressed this question have answered with a resounding “No!” The reasons for this negative answer are many, but two are especially prominent. The first is an argument we can call the “animal-infant” argument. It states that some non-human animals or human infants have experiences, but either lack concepts altogether or lack concepts for some of the things their experiences represent. The second reason for the negative answer is an argument we can call the “fineness-of-grain” argument. In its most common form, this argument points to our ability to make very fine-grained perceptual discriminations, *e.g.*, our ability to discriminate, visually, between very similar shades of red. The argument is that we can, and do, perceptually discriminate far more properties than we possess concepts for, so our experiences can, and do, represent far more properties than we possess concepts for.

The view that experiential contents are non-conceptual is called “non-conceptualism.” The opposing view, according to which experiential contents are conceptual like belief contents, is called “conceptualism.” To be exact, we should define conceptualism as the thesis that all experiential contents are wholly conceptual, and non-conceptualism as the thesis that some experiential contents are at least partly non-conceptual. The animal-infant and fineness-of-grain arguments make sense as arguments for non-conceptualism only if the theses are defined in this way. But actual discussions of the theses tend to be sloppy, speaking of conceptualism simply as the thesis that experiential contents are conceptual, and of non-conceptualism simply as the thesis that experiential contents are non-conceptual.

In this dissertation I defend conceptualism. My defense is very limited. I reply to three arguments for non-conceptualism—the animal-infant argument, the fineness-of-grain argument, and a third argument—but there are many more that I do not even address. I also

present what I believe to be a promising argument for conceptualism, but I acknowledge that the argument needs more development than I can presently provide. My aim is not so much to convince my reader to believe conceptualism, as to convince him or her to take it more seriously than most philosophers currently do. At the same time, I hope to establish a foundation on which I or other future conceptualists might build in rebutting all the arguments for non-conceptualism and developing a convincing argument for conceptualism.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. Part I, which comprises Chapters 1 and 2, aims to elucidate the meanings of the conceptualist and non-conceptualist theses. Once again, conceptualism states that experiential contents are conceptual, and non-conceptualism states that experiential contents are non-conceptual. Elucidating the meanings of these theses requires elucidating both the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality. While the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism provides some of the required elucidation, it generally does not go far enough. The reason, I believe, is that both the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, are perceived as difficult and daunting topics for philosophical investigation. The second topic—the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality—is so perceived because it is perceived as bound up with the nature of concepts, which is perceived as a difficult and daunting topic. Rather than confront these topics head on, the literature often skirts them and proceeds directly to a discussion of the arguments for conceptualism and non-conceptualism. The result is that the significance of the debate between conceptualism and non-conceptualism is often left obscure. Part I confronts the topics of the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, head on. I try to show that these topics are not as difficult and daunting as they may be perceived

to be. Chapter 1 aims to elucidate the nature of experiential contents, and Chapter 2 aims to elucidate the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality.

Part II, which comprises Chapters 3, 4, and 5, examines and criticizes three arguments for non-conceptualism. Chapter 3 focuses on the animal-infant argument, and Chapter 4 focuses on the fineness-of-grain argument. Chapter 5 focuses on a third argument, the “learning” argument, according to which conceptualism is inconsistent with the fact that we learn new concepts on the basis of experiences with corresponding contents. Part III, which comprises Chapters 6 and 7, examines arguments for conceptualism. The best known arguments for conceptualism are epistemological, and their best known exponents are John McDowell and Bill Brewer. In Chapter 6 I identify five epistemological arguments for conceptualism that appear in the writings of McDowell and Brewer, and I try to show that all of them are unconvincing. In Chapter 7 I turn away from epistemology and begin to develop what I believe to be a promising new argument for conceptualism.

**PART I**  
**PRELIMINARIES**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE NATURE OF EXPERIENTIAL CONTENTS**

This part of the dissertation, which comprises this chapter and the next one, aims to elucidate the meanings of the conceptualist and non-conceptualist theses. Once again, conceptualism states that experiential contents are conceptual, and non-conceptualism states that experiential contents are non-conceptual. Elucidating the meanings of these theses requires elucidating both the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality. While the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism provides some of the required elucidation, it generally does not go far enough. The reason, I believe, is that both the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, are perceived as difficult and daunting topics for philosophical investigation. The second topic—the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality—is so perceived because it is perceived as bound up with the nature of concepts, which is perceived as a difficult and daunting topic. Rather than confront these topics head on, the literature often skirts them and proceeds directly to a discussion of the arguments for conceptualism and non-conceptualism. The result is that the significance of the debate between conceptualism and non-conceptualism is often left obscure. This part of the dissertation confronts the topics of the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, head on. I try to show that these topics are not as difficult and daunting as they may be perceived to be. This chapter aims to elucidate the nature of experiential contents, and the next chapter aims to elucidate the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality.



In this chapter I present what strikes me as the most natural account of the nature of experiential contents, an account I call “Propositions Etc.” I claim that Propositions Etc. does a good job of elucidating the nature of experiential contents, and that all or almost all philosophers can accept it consistently with their existing theoretical commitments. In order to bolster the latter claim, I show that Propositions Etc. is consistent with two other philosophers’ accounts of the nature of experiential contents. The first account comes from Christopher Peacocke, and I call it “Scenarios Etc.” The second account comes from Michael Tye, and, following him, I call it the “Singular (When Filled) Thesis.” Adherents of these two accounts can accept Propositions Etc. consistently with their existing theoretical commitments.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents Propositions Etc. The second section presents Scenarios Etc. and shows that Propositions Etc. is consistent with it. And the third section presents the Singular (When Filled) Thesis and shows that Propositions Etc. is consistent with it.

### *1. Propositions Etc.*

Propositions Etc. is a very weak view. It lists nine possible elements of experiential contents, and states that every experiential content is exhaustively composed by some or all of these elements. The view does not say that, for each element, there is an experiential content containing it. Indeed, for each element, it is consistent with Propositions Etc. that no experiential content should contain it. The view says only that every experiential content is exhaustively composed by at least some of the elements. Let’s look at the nine elements.

**(1) Propositions.** Imagine a visual experience of a red round tomato near a green round tomato. A natural thought is that the content of this experience—or at least one part of

the content—is an existential proposition, such as the proposition that there is a red round tomato near a green round tomato. Let’s adopt the convention of referring to propositions by enclosing the sentences expressing them in angle brackets. The idea that we are currently considering is that the experiential content in our example contains <there is a red round tomato near a green round tomato>. No doubt the proposition would actually be more complex, containing information about the tomatoes’ sizes and their distances from the viewer, and about other objects spatially related to the tomatoes, such as the table supporting them and the wall behind them. But let’s ignore these additional complexities for the sake of discussion. Someone might object to using the word “tomato” when specifying the experience’s content. Vision, this objector might say, knows of colors, shapes, and spatial relations, but not of fruits. This objection does not threaten the basic thought that the content contains an existential proposition; the objection only quibbles over precisely which proposition or propositions the content contains. Hence, we can set the objection aside, acknowledging that a perfectly correct specification of the content may need to omit “tomato.”

Supposing that the content in our example contains an existential proposition does not commit us to supposing that all propositions in experiential contents are existential propositions. There may be some experiential contents containing singular propositions. If someone see Theaetetus flying, and recognizes him, the content of the person’s visual experience may contain the singular proposition <Theaetetus flies>. Propositions in experiential contents may have other logical forms as well.

**(2) Proposition fragments.** There is a variation on the proposal that experiential contents contain propositions, a variation that is still in the spirit of the proposal. This

variation says that experiential contents contain, not propositions, but fragments of propositions. We might express such a proposition fragment with a sentence fragment, such as “a red round tomato near a green round tomato” or “flying Theaetetus.” We should acknowledge this variation as a viable alternative to the proposal that experiential contents contain propositions.

**(3) Properties or relations.** We have said that one natural thought about the content of the tomato experience is that the content contains an existential proposition. Another natural thought is that the content contains properties and relations, such as redness, greenness, roundness, tomatohood, and nearness. Let’s adopt the convention of referring to properties and relations by enclosing the predicates expressing them in angle brackets. The idea that we are currently considering is that the experiential content in our example contains <red>, <green>, <round>, <tomato>, and <near>. Once again, someone might object to including <tomato> among these examples. And once again, the objection does not threaten the basic thought that properties and relations belong to the content. Hence, we may once again set the objection aside, acknowledging that <tomato> may not really belong among the other examples. It is natural to suppose that the properties and relations in the content compose the existential proposition we have identified. The only reason I can see to resist this supposition is metaphysical; we might worry that properties and relations and propositions are not the kinds of things that can stand in compositional relations to each other. If this metaphysical worry moves us, we may have to settle for affirming a “very intimate relation” between the properties and relations and the proposition.

**(4) Individuals.** If we allow singular propositions to belong to experiential contents, much of what we have been saying about properties and relations will also have to be said

about individuals. We will find it natural to think that Theaetetus belongs to the experiential content containing <Theaetetus flies>, and natural to suppose that the individual, together with <fly>, composes the proposition. Metaphysical worries may lead us to deny that the individual composes the proposition, and to settle for affirming a very intimate relation.

**(5) Haecceities.** If we allow singular propositions to belong to experiential contents, and we affirm that individuals belong to experiential contents containing singular propositions, we run into certain metaphysical problems. For there may be experiential contents containing singular propositions about non-existent individuals. The experiential content containing <Theaetetus flies> may be such a content, since Theaetetus does not presently exist. On the other hand, Theaetetus may exist tenselessly. A dream about Pegasus may involve an experience whose content contains a singular proposition about an individual that does not exist even tenselessly. If these metaphysical problems drive us to deny that individuals belong to experiential contents containing singular propositions, we may choose to affirm that haecceities belong to such contents. At any rate, the possibility of experiential contents containing singular propositions about non-existent individuals must constrain our theorizing about how individuals relate to experiential contents containing singular propositions.

**(6) Logical entities.** Let's return to the visual experience of a red round tomato near a green round tomato. If an existential proposition is part of the experience's content, then it is natural to think that the content contains some sort of "logical entity" corresponding to the existential quantifier "there is." This logical entity might be a function mapping inputs to truth values. If we were dealing with a sentential connective, such as "and," the function would simply be a truth function, and its inputs would be truth values or ordered pairs of

truth values. Since we are dealing with a quantifier, the function is more complicated. Its inputs are, perhaps, ordered pairs whose first members are domains, and whose second members are something like open sentences with exactly one free variable. Another candidate for the logical entity corresponding to the existential quantifier is a set of inference rules. The logical entity may compose the existential proposition, or merely relate very intimately to it.

**(7) Indexical entities.** It may be possible to have an experience with an indexical content. For instance, it may be possible to have a visual experience of a red round tomato near a green round tomato *here*. To say that the experience has an indexical content is, presumably, to say that different tokens of the experience type can have different non-indexical contents, and that the content of any given token is determined, in part, by its context. Since we used the indexical term “here” to describe the indexical tomato experience, the content of a given token of the experience presumably contains the place occupied by the subject, or the property of being at the place. It is also natural to think that there is a part of the content of the indexical tomato experience that corresponds to the indexical term “here,” but does not vary among the contents of different tokens of the experience. We can call this invariable part of the content an “indexical entity.” The indexical entity combines with contexts to determine the content of any given token of the experience. The most natural conception of the indexical entity corresponding to “here” is as a function mapping contexts to places or properties of being at places. It may also be possible to have an experience with a demonstrative content. For instance, it may be possible to have a visual experience of *this* near a green round tomato, or of *this* red round tomato near a green round tomato. Presumably, experiences with demonstrative contents function much like experiences with

indexical contents: different tokens of such an experience type can have different contents, the content of any given token is determined by its context, and it is natural to think that the contents of all tokens of one type contain an invariable indexical entity (or “demonstrative entity”) that combines with contexts to determine the content of any given token.

**(8) Fregean senses, Fregean thoughts, or Fregean thought fragments.** We have now identified seven elements that might compose experiential contents: propositions, proposition fragments, properties or relations, individuals, haecceities, logical entities, and indexical entities. At this point, someone might suggest that we have told only half the story about experiential contents. This person might suggest that experiential contents have a two-tiered structure, with the seven elements we have so far identified all belonging to the bottom tier if they compose experiential contents at all. The idea behind this suggestion has three parts.

The first part is that the content of a word contains both a Fregean sense (or mode of presentation) and a Fregean reference, with the Fregean sense determining the Fregean reference.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the words “groundhog” and “woodchuck” have different Fregean senses but the same Fregean reference. Fregean references can be individuals, properties, relations, or other entities. The common Fregean reference of “groundhog” and “woodchuck” might be <groundhog>, which is also <woodchuck>. Let’s adopt the convention of referring to Fregean senses by enclosing the words with them in double angle brackets. The Fregean senses of “groundhog” and “woodchuck” are <<groundhog>> and <<woodchuck>>, respectively. While <groundhog> and <woodchuck> are identical, <<groundhog>> and <<woodchuck>> are distinct. The distinction between Fregean senses and Fregean references

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Zalta gives reasons for distinguishing Fregean senses from modes of presentation (2001, §1). Identifying the two things will cause no problems in the present context.

is easiest to grasp when two words have the same Fregean reference, but the distinction applies universally. The word “tomato” has a Fregean sense and a Fregean reference, distinct from each other, with the Fregean sense determining the Fregean reference. The Fregean sense is  $\langle\langle\text{tomato}\rangle\rangle$ , and the Fregean reference might be  $\langle\text{tomato}\rangle$ . If we suppose that the Fregean reference is  $\langle\text{tomato}\rangle$ , the difference between  $\langle\langle\text{tomato}\rangle\rangle$  and  $\langle\text{tomato}\rangle$  may seem obscure. But the difference is to be understood on the model of the difference between  $\langle\langle\text{groundhog}\rangle\rangle$  and  $\langle\text{groundhog}\rangle$ , assuming that  $\langle\text{groundhog}\rangle$  is the Fregean reference of “groundhog.” Apart from reference to this model, there is no way to elucidate the difference between  $\langle\langle\text{tomato}\rangle\rangle$  and  $\langle\text{tomato}\rangle$ .

The second part is that the content of a declarative sentence contains both a Fregean thought and a proposition, with the Fregean thought determining the proposition. For instance, the sentences “Groundhogs are marmots” and “Woodchucks are marmots” express different Fregean thoughts but the same proposition. The proposition is  $\langle\text{groundhogs are marmots}\rangle$ , which is also  $\langle\text{woodchucks are marmots}\rangle$ . Let’s adopt the convention of referring to Fregean thoughts by enclosing the declarative sentences expressing them in double angle brackets. The Fregean thoughts expressed by “Groundhogs are marmots” and “Woodchucks are marmots” are  $\langle\langle\text{groundhogs are marmots}\rangle\rangle$  and  $\langle\langle\text{woodchucks are marmots}\rangle\rangle$ , respectively. While  $\langle\text{groundhogs are marmots}\rangle$  and  $\langle\text{woodchucks are marmots}\rangle$  are identical,  $\langle\langle\text{groundhogs are marmots}\rangle\rangle$  and  $\langle\langle\text{woodchucks are marmots}\rangle\rangle$  are distinct. The distinction between Fregean thoughts and propositions is easiest to grasp when two sentences express the same proposition, but the distinction applies universally. The sentence “Tomatoes are fruits” expresses a Fregean thought and a proposition, distinct from each other, with the Fregean thought determining the proposition. The Fregean thought is  $\langle\langle\text{tomatoes are}$

fruits>>, and the proposition is <tomatoes are fruits>. The difference between <<tomatoes are fruits>> and <tomatoes are fruits> may seem obscure, but it is to be understood on the model of the difference between <<groundhogs are marmots>> and <groundhogs are marmots>. Apart from reference to this model, there is no way to elucidate the difference between <<tomatoes are fruits>> and <tomatoes are fruits>.

The third part concerns the interrelations among Fregean senses, Fregean references, Fregean thoughts, and propositions. According to this part, the Fregean thought expressed by a sentence is the Fregean sense of the whole sentence. The Fregean thought comprises, or very intimately relates to, the Fregean senses of the words composing the sentence. The proposition is the Fregean reference of the whole sentence, and it comprises, or very intimately relates to, the Fregean references of the words composing the sentence. If we contrast propositions with Fregean thoughts, then we might think of propositions as Russellian propositions, or structured entities composed of individuals, properties, relations and other Fregean references.<sup>2</sup>

We are considering a suggestion according to which experiential contents have a two-tiered structure, with the seven elements we have so far identified all belonging to the bottom tier. The suggestion is that the top tier contains Fregean senses and Fregean thoughts determining the elements in the bottom tier, which are Fregean references and propositions. To get a clearer picture of a two-tiered experiential content, let's return to the visual experience of a red round tomato near a green round tomato. If this experiential content is two-tiered, then what we have said about it so far applies only to the bottom tier. The bottom tier contains the existential proposition <there is a red round tomato near a green round

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<sup>2</sup> Both Peacocke (1992, pp. 2 – 3, 14, 16 – 17, 22 – 24) and Zalta (2001, p. 335, §2, pp. 345 – 346) suggest this picture of the interrelations among Fregean senses, Fregean references, Fregean thoughts, and propositions.



tomato> and the properties and relations <red>, <green>, <round>, <tomato>, and <near>. The properties and relations either compose or relate very intimately to the proposition. The bottom tier also contains the logical entity corresponding to the existential quantifier “there is,” and this logical entity either composes or relates very intimately to the proposition. The top tier contains the Fregean thought <<there is a red round tomato near a green round tomato>>, which determines the proposition in the bottom tier. The top tier also contains the Fregean senses <<red>>, <<green>>, <<round>>, <<tomato>>, and <<near>>, which determine the properties and relations in the bottom tier. Finally, the top tier contains the Fregean sense <<there is>>, which determines the logical entity in the bottom tier. We can say either that the Fregean senses in the top tier compose the Fregean thought, or that they merely relate very intimately to it. If an experiential content has individuals, haecceities, or indexical entities in its bottom tier, Fregean senses in the top tier determine them. If we wish to affirm that the bottom tiers of experiential contents contain not whole propositions, but proposition fragments, then we may affirm that the top tiers contain not whole Fregean thoughts, but Fregean thought fragments.<sup>3</sup>

We may wish to revise our picture of two-tiered experiential contents slightly by promoting certain elements out of the bottom tier into the top tier. For instance, we may affirm that haecceities are Fregean senses determining individuals in the bottom tier. Theaetetus’s haecceity would be <<Theaetetus>>, and it would determine Theaetetus in the bottom tier. We earlier identified two candidates for logical entities: functions from inputs to

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<sup>3</sup> Both Peacocke (1992, pp. 2 – 3, 14, 16 – 17, 22 – 24, 43) and Zalta (2001, p. 335, §2, pp. 345 – 346) suggest that some mental contents have this two-tiered structure. Peacocke might allow that parts of experiential contents have such a structure, but he would not allow that whole experiential contents have it (see 1992, ch. 3). It is unclear whether Zalta would allow that experiential contents have such a structure, but pp. 343 – 344 of his discussion suggest that he might. We should note that Zalta actually distinguishes Fregean senses from modes of presentation and develops his view of mental contents in terms of the latter (2001, §§1 – 2).

truth values and sets of inference rules. We may now affirm that one of these candidates is the Fregean sense of a logical term, and that the other is the Fregean reference. For instance, the function corresponding to “there is” might be  $\langle\langle\text{there is}\rangle\rangle$ , and it might determine the corresponding set of inference rules in the bottom tier. Finally, we may assert that indexical entities are Fregean senses determining, in combination with context, individuals or properties in the bottom tier. The indexical entity corresponding to “here” would be  $\langle\langle\text{here}\rangle\rangle$ , and it would determine, in combination with context, places or properties of being at places in the bottom tier.

**(9) Set theoretic constructions out of the first eight elements.** We have now identified eight elements that might compose experiential contents: propositions; proposition fragments; properties or relations; individuals; haecceities; logical entities; indexical entities; and Fregean senses, Fregean thoughts, or Fregean thought fragments. We should also allow for the possibility that experiential contents contain set theoretic constructions out of these first eight elements: sets of the elements, sets of such sets, and so forth.

We have now identified nine elements that might compose experiential contents: propositions; proposition fragments; properties or relations; individuals; haecceities; logical entities; indexical entities; Fregean senses, Fregean thoughts, or Fregean thought fragments; and set theoretic constructions out of the first eight elements. Propositions Etc. states that every experiential content is exhaustively composed by some or all of these nine elements. The view does not say that, for each element, there is an experiential content containing it. Indeed, for each element, it is consistent with Propositions Etc. that no experiential content should contain it. The view says only that every experiential content is exhaustively composed by at least some of the elements.

Propositions Etc. strikes me as the most natural account of the nature of experiential contents. I claim that it does a good job of elucidating the nature of experiential contents, and that all or almost all philosophers can accept it consistently with their existing theoretical commitments. In order to bolster the latter claim, I now turn to showing that Propositions Etc. is consistent with two other philosophers' accounts of the nature of experiential contents. The first account comes from Peacocke, and I call it "Scenarios Etc." The second account comes from Tye, and, following him, I call it the "Singular (When Filled) Thesis." Adherents of these two accounts can accept Propositions Etc. consistently with their existing theoretical commitments.

## *2. Scenarios Etc.*

I call Peacocke's account of the nature of experiential contents "Scenarios Etc." According to Peacocke, experiential contents contain three elements: "scenarios," "protopositions," and concepts. He does not affirm that these elements exhaustively compose experiential contents. He affirms only that, for each element, there is an experiential content containing it. Let's examine the three elements in turn. In each case we will see that the presence of the element in experiential contents is consistent with Propositions Etc.

First, Peacocke holds that experiential contents contain "scenarios." A scenario is a way of filling the space around the subject of an experience. We specify a scenario in two steps. The first step is to specify an origin and a set of axes. We do not specify the origin and axes by naming a particular point and set of directions in the world. For example, we do not define the origin as the point with such-and-such latitude, longitude, and altitude, and the axes as north/south, east/west, and up/down. We specify the origin and axes by naming a set of interrelated properties. "Thus, for instance," Peacocke writes, "one kind of origin is given

by the property of being the center of the chest of the human body, with the three axes given by the directions back/front, left/right, and up/down with respect to that center.”<sup>4</sup> The second step in specifying a scenario is specifying a way of filling the space around the origin.

Peacocke describes at least some of what this step involves in the following passage:

For each point ..., identified by its distance and direction from the origin, we need to specify whether there is a surface there and, if so, what texture, hue, saturation, and brightness it has at that point, together with its degree of solidity. The orientation of the surface must be included. So must much more in the visual case: the direction, intensity, and character of light sources; the rate of change of perceptible properties, including location; indeed, it should include second differentials with respect to time where these prove to be perceptible.<sup>5</sup>

Peacocke notes that, in the second step, we actually should specify a set of different but similar ways of filling the space around the origin. Specifying a set of ways “can capture the degree of the experiencer’s perceptual acuity. Greater acuity corresponds to restriction of the set of ways....”<sup>6</sup> If someone has blurry vision, for example, that person might not see precisely where the edges of objects lie in space. If the person sees a certain object, and a certain point is near the object’s edge, then a scenario in the content of the person’s visual experience might contain two ways of filling the space around the origin, one that puts part of the object’s surface at the point, and one that leaves the point unoccupied. If someone with better vision sees the same object in the same place, a scenario in the content of that person’s visual experience might contain only one of these two ways. A scenario is a way (more precisely, a set of ways) of filling the space around the subject of an experience. A scenario in the content of a particular experience is correct just in case the space around the subject of

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<sup>4</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 63.

the experience is filled in the way that is the scenario (more precisely, in one of the ways the scenario contains).<sup>7</sup>

It is natural to identify a scenario with a certain mathematical object, an ordered pair. The first member of the ordered pair is a set of interrelated properties specifying an origin and a set of axes. The second member is a mathematical function whose domain is the set of all points around the origin, identified by their distances and directions from the origin. The function maps a given point to a set of properties. One property in the set is either the property of being occupied by a surface or the property of being unoccupied. If the property of being occupied by a surface is in the set, then the set also contains many other properties: texture, hue, saturation, brightness, etc. If the property of being unoccupied is in the set, it is the only property in the set. (To be more precise, the second member of the ordered pair is a set of such functions, one for each way in the scenario.) Let's call a scenario conceived of as an ordered pair a "mathematical scenario." Propositions Etc. says that experiential contents are exhaustively composed by some or all of the following nine elements: propositions; proposition fragments; properties or relations; individuals; haecceities; logical entities; indexical entities; Fregean senses, Fregean thoughts, or Fregean thought fragments; and set theoretic constructions out of the first eight elements. Since ordered pairs, functions, and points can be identified with set theoretic constructions, Propositions Etc. is consistent with the presence of mathematical scenarios in experiential contents.

While it is natural to identify a scenario with an ordered pair, it is also natural to identify a scenario with a set of propositions (more precisely, with a set of sets of propositions, one set of propositions for each way in the scenario). Imagine that a certain scenario specifies that the origin is the center of the chest, and that the axes are the directions

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<sup>7</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 61 – 65.

back/front, left/right, and up/down with respect to the center of the chest. Also imagine that the scenario puts a surface with the properties  $F_1, F_2, \dots$ , and  $F_n$  at a certain point,  $(x, y, z)$ . We can identify the scenario with a set of propositions containing the existential proposition <there is a surface with  $F_1, F_2, \dots$ , and  $F_n$  distance  $x$  in front of the center of the chest, distance  $y$  to the right of the center of the chest, and distance  $z$  above the center of the chest>. If the scenario leaves a certain point,  $(x', y', z')$ , unoccupied, the set of propositions contains the negative existential proposition <there is nothing distance  $x'$  in front of the center of the chest, distance  $y'$  to the right of the center of the chest, and distance  $z'$  above the center of the chest>. There is also another set of propositions with which it is natural to identify a scenario. This set does not contain a distinct proposition for each point around the origin. Rather, a given proposition in the set affirms one of two things: that there is a whole, extended object with a certain size and shape, and certain other properties, a certain direction and distance from the center of the chest (or whatever is specified as the origin); or that there is nothing in the region of space with a certain size and shape a certain direction and distance from the center of the chest (or whatever is specified as the origin). Sufficiently many such propositions will determine a complete way of filling the space around the subject. Let's call a scenario conceived of as a set of propositions a "propositional scenario." Propositions Etc. is obviously consistent with the presence of propositional scenarios in experiential contents. And while the presence of mathematical scenarios in experiential contents is consistent with Propositions Etc., the presence of propositional scenarios is more in the spirit of the view.

In addition to scenarios, Peacocke holds that experiential contents contain "protopositions" and concepts. Peacocke explains what a protoposition is in the following passage:

A protoposition contains an individual or individuals, together with a property or relation. When a protoposition is part of the representational content of an experience, the experience represents the property or relation in the protoposition as holding of the individual or individuals it also contains.<sup>8</sup>

Protopositions certainly look a lot like propositions. So why doesn't Peacocke simply call them "propositions"? He writes "I write of *protopositions* because in this account they are not determined as part of the content of an experience by being fixed by some conceptual content the experience possesses."<sup>9</sup> The presumption behind this statement seems to be that a part of an experiential content counts as a proposition only if it is determined by some conceptual part of the content. I can find no argument for this presumption. As far as I can tell, the presumption merely reflects Peacocke's choice of how to use the word "proposition." I do not use the word in this way. As I use the word, the fact that a part of an experiential content is a proposition places no constraint on how the part is determined. I also believe that my usage is the more common usage among philosophers. Hence, we may simply equate protopositions with propositions. The presence of protopositions in experiential contents is consistent with Propositions Etc.

We should briefly examine Peacocke's motivations for introducing protopositions into his account of experiential contents. There are two motivations. The first concerns the fact that a square can be seen either as a square or as a tilted regular diamond. We cannot explain the difference between these two ways of seeing the square by appealing to different scenarios in the experiential content. Rather, we must appeal to different protopositions in the content. Peacocke suggests that, when we see the square as a square, our experience contains the protoposition that the square is symmetrical about its lateral bisectors; and

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<sup>8</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 77, italics in original.

that, when we see the square as a tilted regular diamond, our experience contains the protoproposition that the square is symmetrical about its angular bisectors.<sup>10</sup> The second motivation concerns experiences of “impossible” objects, such as the Penrose triangle. We cannot account for such an experience by appealing to scenarios in the experiential content. We must instead appeal to inconsistent protopropositions in the content.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to scenarios and protopropositions, Peacocke holds that experiential contents contain concepts.<sup>12</sup> Peacocke identifies concepts with Fregean senses or modes of presentation.<sup>13</sup> Hence, his belief that concepts compose experiential contents is just the belief that Fregean senses compose experiential contents. This belief is obviously consistent with Propositions Etc.

We have now seen that Propositions Etc. is consistent with Scenarios Etc. However, there is another aspect of Peacocke’s discussion of the nature of experiential contents that deserves our attention. He argues against what he calls “purely propositional accounts” of the nature of experiential contents.<sup>14</sup> A purely propositional account of the nature of experiential contents is an account that “identifies the representational content [of an experience] with a set of propositions.”<sup>15</sup> It also emerges, in the course of Peacocke’s presentation of his argument, that he counts an account of the nature of experiential contents as a purely propositional account if the account allows modes of presentation to belong to an

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<sup>10</sup> Peacocke 1992 pp. 74 – 79.

<sup>11</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 73 – 74, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 73, 80 – 81, 85, 88 – 90.

<sup>13</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>14</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 69 – 72.

<sup>15</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 70.



experience's content.<sup>16</sup> We can use the term "pure propositionalism" to refer to the view that some purely propositional account or other is true. The conclusion of Peacocke's argument is simply that pure propositionalism is false.

Peacocke's argument against pure propositionalism deserves our attention because I suggested earlier that the scenarios in experiential contents are propositional scenarios, which are defined as sets of propositions (more precisely, as sets of sets of propositions, one set of propositions for each way in a scenario). Strictly speaking, this suggestion is consistent with the falsehood of pure propositionalism. Pure propositionalism identifies whole experiential contents with sets of propositions, and the scenarios in experiential contents are not necessarily whole experiential contents. Nevertheless, I suspect that Peacocke would adapt his argument against pure propositionalism to argue against the identification of the scenarios in experiential contents with sets of propositions. Thus we need to examine Peacocke's argument against pure propositionalism.

The argument begins with two assumptions. The first assumption is that, for every concept, there exists a true, non-circular account or explanation of what it is to possess the concept. This assumption applies, in particular, to the first-person concept, I or ME. There exists a true, non-circular account or explanation of what it is to possess the first-person concept. The second assumption Peacocke takes from Gareth Evans and calls "Evans's Thesis." Here is Peacocke's statement of it:

It is partially constitutive of a subject's employing the first-person way of thinking that he is prepared to make noninferential, suitable first-person spatial judgments on the basis of his perceptions when these are taken at face value. These will include "I

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<sup>16</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 71. Peacocke speaks of a "way of thinking," but he seems to be referring to a mode of presentation.

am on a bridge” when he has an experience as of being on a bridge, “I am in front of a building,” “There is a dog on my right,” and so forth.<sup>17</sup>

By “the first-person way of thinking” Peacocke means “the first-person concept.” Peacocke holds that any true, non-circular account or explanation of what it is to possess the first-person concept will incorporate Evans’s Thesis. Peacocke explicitly relates Evans’s Thesis to scenarios in experiential contents in the following passage:

... a fundamental type of representational content is given by a scenario, a spatial type with a labeled origin and labeled axes. The rational sensitivity picked out in Evans’s Thesis should be understood as a rational sensitivity of first-person, present-tense spatial judgments to the spatial relations that things are represented in the scenario of the experience as having *to the labeled central bodily origin and axes*.<sup>18</sup>

Here Peacocke refers to “the rational sensitivity picked out in Evans’s Thesis.” Let’s call this rational sensitivity the “Evansian sensitivity.” Peacocke seems to be constructing an explanatory chain. Possession of the first-person concept is explained in terms of the Evansian sensitivity, and the Evansian sensitivity is explained in terms of scenarios in experiential contents. This chain contains no circularity.

The argument against pure propositionalism is that there is no parallel, non-circular explanatory chain available to the pure propositionalist. The pure propositionalist can explain possession of the first-person concept in terms of the Evansian sensitivity with no apparent problem. If the pure propositionalist is going to explain the Evansian sensitivity in terms of something in experiential contents, it seems that the explanation must be in terms of first-person spatial propositions in experiential contents. Now the pure propositionalist faces a dilemma. The notion of a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content can be understood in a weaker way or a stronger way.

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<sup>17</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 71. Peacocke cites Evans 1982, chapters 6, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 72, italics in original.

On the weaker understanding, a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content is defined as a proposition in an experiential content that attributes a spatial relation to the subject and an object. On this understanding, no appeal to first-person spatial propositions in experiential contents can explain the Evansian sensitivity. The reason is that “one can see something as having a particular direction in relation to an object ... which is in fact oneself while not realizing that the object to which one sees it as bearing that relation is in fact oneself. Examples of persons seen in mirrors suffice to make the point.”<sup>19</sup> If I look in a mirror and see myself on a bridge, but do not recognize myself, then a proposition in my experiential content will attribute the spatial relation <on> to me and the bridge. On the weaker understanding, my experience will contain a first-person spatial proposition attributing <on> to me and the bridge. But I will not be prepared to make, on the basis of the experience when it is taken at face value, the noninferential, first-person spatial judgment “I am on a bridge.” What I will be prepared to make, on the basis of the experience when it is taken at face value, is the noninferential, third-person spatial judgment “There is a person on a bridge.”

On the stronger understanding, a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content is defined as a proposition in an experiential content that both attributes a spatial relation to the subject and an object and “involves use of the first-person way of thinking.”<sup>20</sup> We already said that by “the first-person way of thinking” Peacocke means “the first-person concept.” He also means “the first person mode of presentation.” For Peacocke, ways of thinking, concepts, and modes of presentation all come to the same thing. On the stronger understanding, an experiential content contains a first-person spatial proposition only if the

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<sup>19</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 70 – 71.

<sup>20</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 71.

experiential content contains the first-person mode of presentation, which is the first-person concept. Presumably, an experiential content contains the first-person concept only if the subject possesses the first-person concept. Therefore, on the stronger understanding, an experiential content contains a first-person spatial proposition only if the subject possesses the first-person concept. The problem with the stronger understanding is that it introduces circularity into the explanation of possession of the first-person concept. On this understanding, the pure propositionalist is explaining possession of the first-person concept in terms of the Evansian sensitivity, and explaining the Evansian sensitivity in terms of first-person spatial propositions in experiential contents, where the notion of a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content implies possession of the first-person concept. As Peacocke writes, “An account of mastery of a concept is still circular if it adverts, without further elaboration or explanation, to relations to perceptual states with a content requiring possession of the concept, the first-person concept, whose possession was to be elucidated.”<sup>21</sup>

I have two objections to this argument. The first objection is that the dilemma the argument foists on the pure propositionalist is a false dilemma. The dilemma is between a weaker and a stronger understanding of the notion of a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content. On the weaker understanding, a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content is defined as a proposition in an experiential content that attributes a spatial relation to the subject and an object. On the stronger understanding, a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content is defined as a proposition in an experiential content that both attributes a spatial relation to the subject and an object and “involves use of the first-person way of thinking.” There is a third understanding. On this understanding, a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content is defined as a proposition in an

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<sup>21</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 72.

experiential content that both attributes a spatial relation to the subject and an object and has the subject as a constituent. Recall the case in which I look in a mirror and see myself on a bridge, but do not recognize myself. Contrast this case with a more mundane case in which I look down and see a bridge directly beneath me. The pure propositionalist can hold that in the mundane case, but not in the mirror case, my experiential content contains the proposition <I am on a bridge>, which has me as a constituent. In the mirror case my experiential content contains the proposition <there is a person on a bridge>, where the only constituents of this proposition are the logical entity corresponding to the existential quantifier “there is,” and the properties and relations <person>, <bridge>, and <on>. We can still say that this proposition attributes the spatial relation <on> to me and the bridge, for there is an appropriate causal connection between me and the bridge, on the one hand, and the presence of <person> and <bridge> in the experiential content, on the other hand. On the third understanding, <I am on a bridge> is a first-person spatial proposition in an experiential content while <there is a person on a bridge> is not.

If we adopt the third understanding, then, in the mundane case, my experiential content contains a first-person spatial proposition attributing the spatial relation <on> to me and the bridge. In this case I am prepared to make, on the basis of the experience when it is taken at face value, the noninferential, first-person spatial judgment “I am on a bridge.” In the mirror case, my experiential content contains no first-person spatial proposition attributing the spatial relation <on> to me and the bridge. In this case I am not prepared to make, on the basis of the experience when it is taken at face value, the noninferential, first-person spatial judgment “I am on a bridge.” Thus it seems that, on the third understanding, appeal to first-person spatial propositions in experiential contents can explain the Evansian

sensitivity. And on the third understanding, experiential contents can contain first-person spatial propositions without containing the first-person mode of presentation or the first-person concept. Thus the third understanding introduces no circularity into the explanation of possession of the first-person concept. We have escaped between the horns of Peacocke's dilemma.

My second objection to Peacocke's argument against pure propositionalism is independent of my first objection. The second objection is to the idea that the pure propositionalist is required to construct a non-circular explanatory chain from possession of the first-person concept, to the Evansian sensitivity, to something in experiential contents. There is a widely held thesis in the philosophy of mind called "naturalism." Roughly speaking, naturalism says that minds and mental phenomena do not belong to the fundamental furniture of the universe, and that the mental can be exhaustively reduced to the non-mental. If naturalism is true, then there exists a true, non-circular explanation of all mental phenomena—a naturalistic explanation entirely in non-mental terms. This explanation presumably explains possession of the first-person concept, the Evansian sensitivity, and everything in experiential contents. Thus the pure propositionalist need not be embarrassed by the inability to construct a non-circular explanatory chain from possession of the first-person concept, to the Evansian sensitivity, to something in experiential contents. The pure propositionalist can simply insist that there exists a true, non-circular, naturalistic explanation of possession of the first-person concept, the Evansian sensitivity, and everything in experiential contents.

The pure propositionalist who takes this tack can still acknowledge the existence of interesting dependencies among possession of the first-person concept, the Evansian

sensitivity, and things in experiential contents. Evans's Thesis states that possession of the first-person concept depends on the Evansian sensitivity, and it is intuitive that the Evansian sensitivity depends on something in experiential contents. Peacocke assumes that these dependence relations correspond to explanatory relations, and that to make the Evansian sensitivity dependent on something in experiential contents that is in turn dependent on possession of the first-person concept is to create an explanatory circle. However, the pure propositionalist can deny that the dependence relations correspond to explanatory relations. The pure propositionalist can make the Evansian sensitivity dependent on something in experiential contents that is in turn dependent on possession of the first-person concept, and he or she can hold that possession of the first-person concept, the Evansian sensitivity, and the thing in experiential contents constitute an interdependent system of mental phenomena. Even though no element of this system non-circularly explains any other element, there still exists a true, non-circular, naturalistic explanation of the whole system—of all the elements and of all their interdependencies.<sup>22</sup>

### *3. The Singular (When Filled) Thesis*

Tye calls his view on the nature of experiential contents the "Singular (When Filled) Thesis." According to this view, an experiential content is an "*SWF* content schema." In the case of an ordinary, veridical experience, the *SWF* schema is simply a true singular proposition. When you see a red round tomato, for example, the content of your visual experience might be the true singular proposition <that is a red round tomato>, where "that" refers to the tomato, and the tomato enters into the proposition. In the case of an illusory experience, the *SWF* schema is a false singular proposition. When you see a red round tomato as a green round tomato, the content of your visual experience might be the false singular proposition <that is a green

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. McDowell 1994, Afterword, Part II, §2.

round tomato>, where “that” refers to the tomato, and the tomato enters into the proposition. In the case of a hallucinatory experience, the *SWF* schema is just like a singular proposition, except that it has a gap or a slot (or gaps or slots) in it where a true singular proposition has an object (or objects). When you hallucinate a red round tomato, the content of your visual experience is just like the singular proposition <that is a red round tomato>, except that it has a gap at the place corresponding to “that.” These gaps are filled by objects in the cases of veridical and illusory experiences to yield singular propositions.<sup>23</sup> The Singular (When Filled) Thesis seems perfectly consistent with Propositions Etc. The latter view explicitly allows singular propositions into experiential contents. “Gappy” propositions are naturally identified with what I have called “proposition fragments,” or perhaps with set theoretic constructions out of proposition fragments.<sup>24</sup>

Tye’s discussion of the nature of experiential contents contains two other components that deserve our attention. First, he considers and replies to an objection to the Singular (When Filled) Thesis. The objection concerns cases of veridical hallucination, such as a case in which one hallucinates a red round tomato, and there actually is a red round tomato before one’s eyes, but one does not see the tomato because it is prevented from causing one’s experience. The objection runs as follows: In a case of veridical hallucination, the subject’s experience is veridical. But, according to the Singular (When Filled) Thesis, the experience’s content is a gappy proposition, and so untrue (either false or neither true nor false). Since an experience with an untrue content is non-veridical, the Singular (When Filled) Thesis

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<sup>23</sup> Tye 2009, pp. 80 – 82.

<sup>24</sup> Tye (2009, p. 82) is explicitly non-committal about the metaphysics of gappy propositions.



delivers the wrong verdict about cases of veridical hallucination.<sup>25</sup> Tye responds to this objection by adopting the following position: “Cases of veridical hallucination are veridical ... only to the extent that the visual experiences they involve dispose their subjects to form true beliefs. The experiences themselves, however, are falsidical, or at best neither true nor false.”<sup>26</sup> An example of the type of true belief Tye has in mind here is, in the case of the veridical hallucination of the red round tomato, the existential belief that there is a red round tomato.

Tye’s position on veridical hallucination is hard to make sense of. He seems to be saying that veridical hallucinations are both veridical, in one way, and non-veridical, in another way. They’re veridical in that they dispose their subjects to form true beliefs, but they’re non-veridical in themselves. This strikes me as an abuse of language. Consider a false belief from which a subject infers a true belief. Perhaps Smith falsely believes that Jones owns a Ford, and from this belief infers the true belief that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona. The belief that Jones owns a Ford is just false, period. No one would say that it’s false in itself, but also true in that it disposes its subject to form a true belief. Exactly parallel remarks go for a gappy belief from which the subject infers a true belief. Suppose that Smith believes that Jones owns a Ford, and that Jones doesn’t exist—he’s merely a figment of Smith’s imagination. The belief is gappy. It may be false or neither true nor false, but it’s definitely untrue. No one would say that it’s also true, in a way, because Smith infers from it the true belief that either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona. Since we do not call untrue beliefs true when they dispose us to form true beliefs, we should not call non-veridical experiences veridical when they dispose us to form true beliefs.

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<sup>25</sup> Tye 2009, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Tye 2009, p. 92.

Perhaps what Tye really means to say is that there are no veridical hallucinations. The cases philosophers have so described are actually misdescribed. Philosophers have mistakenly attributed the veridicality of the beliefs the hallucinations dispose their subjects to form to the non-veridical hallucinations themselves. This position seems untenable, for a great many philosophers have found it perfectly natural and unproblematic to describe the cases in question as cases of veridical hallucination.<sup>27</sup> If these philosophers have been misled by the veridicality of the beliefs associated with the hallucinations, then two questions need to be answered. First, why do philosophers never mistakenly describe false beliefs as true when true beliefs are inferred from the false ones? Second, why does the veridicality of the beliefs associated with the hallucinations influence philosophers' descriptions more than the non-veridicality of the hallucinations themselves? It is not clear how Tye could answer these questions, so cases of veridical hallucination seem to constitute a serious embarrassment for his view.

Tye's discussion of the nature of experiential contents contains a second component deserving our attention. He criticizes a thesis he calls the "Existential Thesis": the thesis that experiential contents are existential propositions into which no individuals enter, or into which only a few individuals—the subject and the time of the experience—enter. One of my earlier objections to Peacocke's argument against pure propositionalism relied on the tenability of a similar view, so I need to answer Tye's criticism.

The criticism begins as follows:

The view that perceptual experiences have singular contents into which the seen objects enter is most strongly motivated by the thought that, in seeing those [objects], they look some way to us, together with the further thought that an object can look a

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Davies 1983, Lewis 1980, McLaughlin 1996, Noë 2003, and Pendlebury 1994.

certain way only if it is experienced *as* being that way. This in turn, seems to require that the object be represented as being that way.<sup>28</sup>

Tye then considers the proposal, consistent with the Existential Thesis, that “what it is for an object to look *F* is for it to cause (in the distinctive way appropriate to seeing) an experience of an *F*, where the experience so caused has an existential content.”<sup>29</sup> The idea behind this proposal is that what it is for a tomato to look red is for the tomato to cause, via a non-deviant causal chain sufficient for seeing, a visual experience whose content contains the existential proposition <there is something red>. Tye criticizes this proposal as follows:

To accept this proposal is to be committed to denying that if *O* looks *F* then *O* is visually experienced as being *F*, for *O* cannot be experienced as being *F* unless the relevant experience represents *O* as *F* (assuming that experience is representational at all). But there seems to me a very strong intuitive pull to the thought that if *O* looks *F*, *O* is represented as *F*; and this is lost on the existential proposal. Furthermore, if experience is representational, then how can *O itself* be visually experienced if *O* is not in the content of the experience? But if it [is] now conceded that, strictly speaking, *O* is not visually experienced on the Existential Thesis, then surely *O* is not seen.<sup>30</sup>

Tye’s argument here seems to turn on two premises: that if *O* looks *F*, then *O* is visually experienced as being *F*; and that if *O* is visually experienced as being *F*, then the visual experience represents *O* as *F*. (There also seems to be another, very similar argument turning on the following two premises: that if *O* is seen, then *O* is visually experienced; and that if *O* is visually experienced, then the visual experience represents *O*. This second argument is so similar to the first that I will ignore it, operating under the assumption that all the criticisms I make of the first argument can be adapted to the second.) The first problem I have with this argument concerns the (schematic) statement “*O* is visually experienced as being *F*,” which

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<sup>28</sup> Tye 2009, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Tye 2009, pp. 88 – 89.

<sup>30</sup> Tye 2009, p. 93, italics in original.

is the first premise's consequent and the second premise's antecedent. An instance of this (schematic) statement is "the tomato is visually experienced as being red." As far as I can tell, this type of statement has no non-technical, pre-philosophical meaning; the word "experience" is simply not used in this way in ordinary English. Hence, whatever meaning this type of statement has must be a technical, philosophical meaning. But Tye does not make the meaning clear. I can think of only two plausible candidates for the meaning of "*O* is visually experienced as being *F*": the meaning of "*O* looks *F*" and the meaning of "the visual experience represents *O* as *F*." If either of these is the meaning of "*O* is visually experienced as being *F*," however, then one of Tye's premises is trivial and pointless. At any rate, the argument really seems to turn only on the following, single premise: if *O* looks *F*, then the visual experience represents *O* as *F*. About this premise he explicitly states that "there seems to him a very strong intuitive pull to it."

The problem for Tye's argument now is that the proponent of the Existential Thesis won't share his intuition. The proponent will insist that there is a perfectly good way for *O* to look *F* without the visual experience representing *O* as *F*. It's the way Tye has already identified: *O* causes, via a non-deviant causal chain sufficient for seeing, an experience whose content contains the existential proposition <there is an *F*>. The proponent of the Existential Thesis won't be alone in lacking Tye's intuition about the thesis, either. Some philosophers, such as sense-datum theorists and adverbial theorists, deny that experiences are representational at all, and these philosophers will presumably lack the intuition as well.<sup>31</sup> A sense-datum theorist, to take one example, will be perfectly content saying that what it is for

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<sup>31</sup> There aren't many sense-datum theorists or adverbial theorists around anymore. But there are still some contemporary philosophers who deny that experiences are representational; see Brewer 2008 and Travis 2004.

*O* to look *F* is for *O* to cause, via a non-deviant causal chain sufficient for seeing, an *F* sense-datum, which is a non-representational experience.

Admittedly, Tye does seem to suggest that his premise is intuitive only if we assume that experiences are representational. Presumably this suggestion just amounts to the suggestion that the following premise is intuitive: if experiences are representational and *O* looks *F*, then the visual experience represents *O* as *F*. However, it's hard to see how this premise can be more intuitive than the first one we considered. Intuition alone cannot rule out the sense-datum theory, according to which *O* looking *F* is *O* appropriately causing an *F* sense-datum. How then can intuition alone rule out the view according to which *O* looking *F* is *O* appropriately causing a representational experience whose content contains <there is an *F*>?

Tye levels a further criticism against the view that *O* looking *F* is *O* appropriately causing a visual experience whose content contains <there is an *F*>. Here it is:

Suppose that I am seeing two objects, *a* and *b*, such that *a* looks green to me and *b* looks red to me. Object *a* causes my experience of something green, and it does so in the way involved in seeing *a*. But equally so does object *b*. On the existential proposal, in seeing both *a* and *b*, I undergo an experience that represents something green. This experience, however, also represents something red. Thus, *b* not only causes my experience of something red; it also causes my experience of something green, and it does so in the way involved in seeing *b*. Thus, *b* looks red, but it also looks green. Clearly something has gone wrong.<sup>32</sup>

This argument succeeds in showing that the view we are considering—that *O* looking *F* is *O* appropriately causing a visual experience whose content contains <there is an *F*>—is unacceptable as it stands and needs to be refined. But the refinement is relatively straightforward. We need only say this: *O* looking *F* is *O* appropriately causing both a visual experience whose content contains <there is an *F*>, and the presence of <there is an *F*> in the

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<sup>32</sup> Tye 2009, p. 93.

content. In Tye's example, both *a* and *b* appropriately cause a visual experience whose content contains both <there is something green> and <there is something red>. But only *a* appropriately causes the presence of <there is something green> in the content, so *a* looks green and *b* does not. Likewise, only *b* appropriately causes the presence of <there is something red> in the content, so *b* looks red and *a* does not. At this point, someone might worry that the content in Tye's example might not contain <there is something green> and <there is something red> as distinct components. They might be "intermingled," as in the proposition <there are two things, one green and one red>, or, in formal logical notation,  $\langle \exists x \exists y (x \text{ is green} \ \& \ y \text{ is red}) \rangle$ . This is not a serious worry. Even if the existential propositions are intermingled, the content still contains the properties <green> and <red> as distinct components, and we can say that *a* looks green in virtue of appropriately causing the presence of <green> in the content.

Tye has another argument against the Existential Thesis. It is this:

... intuitively, visual experiences have a singular content or at least a putatively singular content. They simply do not present the world to us in the way the Existential Thesis requires. There is a particularity in our experience which the existential thesis fails to capture fully.<sup>33</sup>

This argument seems to me to amount to little more than a blunt statement that the Existential Thesis is intuitively false, and I cannot see that it has any dialectical force. I conclude that all of Tye's criticisms of the Existential Thesis fail.

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<sup>33</sup> Tye 2009, pp. 93 – 94.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE NATURES OF CONCEPTUALITY AND NON-CONCEPTUALITY**

This chapter continues the task of elucidating the meanings of the conceptualist and non-conceptualist theses. Once again, conceptualism states that experiential contents are conceptual, and non-conceptualism states that experiential contents are non-conceptual. Elucidating the meanings of these theses requires elucidating both the nature of experiential contents, and the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality. The last chapter aimed to elucidate the nature of experiential contents. This chapter aims to elucidate the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality. Even though our present concern is with experiential contents, we should note that conceptuality and non-conceptuality are properties that any content of any mental state can potentially instantiate. Indeed, belief contents are a paradigm example of conceptual contents. Any attempt to elucidate the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality should be an attempt to elucidate what it is for any mental content to instantiate these properties.

In this chapter I construct definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, definitions that I call the “disjunctive” definitions. I claim that the disjunctive definitions do a good job of elucidating the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, and that all or almost all philosophers can accept the definitions consistently with their existing theoretical commitments. I begin the construction of the disjunctive definitions by assuming that a mental content is conceptual if it bears a certain relation to concepts, and non-conceptual otherwise. I then proceed to argue that philosophers have effectively proposed only two

plausible accounts of the nature of concepts. For each of these accounts, I provisionally assume its truth and construct what strikes me as the most natural definition of conceptuality given this provisional assumption. I construct the final, disjunctive definition of conceptuality by disjoining the two definitions of conceptuality already constructed, and I define non-conceptuality as the absence of conceptuality.

After completing the construction of the disjunctive definitions, I consider three other pairs of definitions—each pair containing a definition of conceptuality and a definition of non-conceptuality—current in the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism. The first pair is usually called the “state” definitions. The second and third pairs are usually conflated and both called the “content” definitions. I distinguish the second and third pairs and call them the “kind-of-content” definitions and the “constitution-of-content” definitions, respectively. I argue that each of these three pairs of definitions is inferior to the disjunctive definitions, in the sense of doing a worse job of elucidating the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, being consistent with fewer philosophers’ existing theoretical commitments, or being unacceptable for some other reason. What ultimately makes the disjunctive definitions superior to these other pairs of definitions, I contend, is that the disjunctive definitions are constructed by confronting the topic of the nature of concepts head on. By contrast, the other pairs of definitions are constructed with an eye toward avoiding any confrontation with this topic, or else they blithely prejudge a contentious question on the topic. I hope that the construction of the disjunctive definitions shows that the topic is not as difficult and daunting for philosophical investigation as it may be perceived to be.



The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the disjunctive definitions, the second section on the state definitions, the third section on the kind-of-content definitions, and the fourth section on the constitution-of-content definitions.

### *1. The Disjunctive Definitions*

According to the disjunctive definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, a content is conceptual if it bears a certain relation to concepts, and non-conceptual otherwise. The nature of this relation depends on the nature of concepts. I am aware of only three plausible accounts of the nature of concepts. I call them “Concepts as Representations,” “Concepts as Senses,” and “Concepts as Abilities.”<sup>1</sup> I will consider the three accounts in turn. For both Concepts as Representations and Concepts as Senses, I will provisionally assume the truth of the account and construct what strikes me as the most natural definition of conceptuality given this provisional assumption. For Concepts as Abilities, I will argue that it effectively comes to the same thing as Concepts as Representations, and hence that there is no need to construct an additional definition for Concepts as Abilities. Once I have constructed the two definitions of conceptuality, I will disjoin them to get the final, disjunctive definition of conceptuality, and I will define non-conceptuality as the absence of conceptuality.

**Concepts as Representations.** According to Concepts as Representations, concepts are mental representations with contents.<sup>2</sup> A natural view of what the contents of concepts are is a view we can call “Properties Etc.” Properties Etc. is a close cousin of the view we developed in the last chapter and called “Propositions Etc.” Properties Etc. says that the contents of concepts are exhaustively composed by some or all of the following seven elements: properties or relations, individuals, haecceities, logical entities, indexical entities,

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<sup>1</sup> See Laurence and Margolis 1999, pp. 5 – 8, 75 – 77; and Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.

<sup>2</sup> See Laurence and Margolis 1999, pp. 5 – 8, 75 – 77; and Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.1.

Fregean senses, and set theoretic constructions out of the first six elements. Since we examined all of these elements in the last chapter, let's look at each one only briefly.

First, it is natural to suppose that the content of a general, predicative concept, such as TOMATO or NEAR, contains a property or relation, such as tomatohood or nearness.

Second, the content of a singular concept, such as THEAETETUS, might contain an individual, such as Theaetetus. Third, affirming that the content of THEAETETUS contains Theaetetus creates familiar metaphysical problems: Theaetetus does not presently exist, and Pegasus does not exist even tenselessly. If these metaphysical problems drive us to deny that the contents of singular concepts contain individuals, we may choose to affirm that the contents contain haecceities. At any rate, the possibility of singular concepts of non-existent individuals must constrain our theorizing about how individuals relate to the contents of singular concepts. Fourth, it is natural to suppose that the content of a logical concept, such as AND, contains a logical entity, such as a truth function or a set of inference rules. Fifth, it is also natural to suppose that an indexical concept, such as HERE, has an indexical content: different tokens of the concept type can have different contents, and the content of any given token is determined by its context. The content of a given token is an individual or a property or relation, such as a place or the property of being at a place. The content of the indexical concept may also contain an indexical entity, such as a function from contexts to places, that does not vary among the contents of different tokens of the concept. The indexical entity combines with contexts to determine the content of any given token of the concept.

Demonstrative concepts, such as THIS, presumably function much like indexical concepts.

Sixth, the contents of concepts may have a two-tiered structure, with Fregean senses in the top tier determining Fregean references in the bottom tier. The Fregean references are some

or all the five elements we have already identified: properties or relations, individuals, haecceities, logical entities, and indexical entities. If we affirm that the contents of concepts have a two-tiered structure, we may wish to revise our picture of the contents slightly by promoting certain elements from the bottom tier to the top tier. We may wish to affirm that haecceities, logical entities of a certain type, or indexical entities are Fregean senses. Seventh, we should allow that the contents of concepts contain set theoretic constructions out of the first six elements: sets of these elements, sets of such sets, and so forth.

How should we define conceptuality if we provisionally assume the truth of Concepts as Representations? Consider the belief that fish swim. This belief is a mental representation with a conceptual content. Given Concepts as Representations, it is natural to think that the concepts FISH and SWIM compose the belief. It is also natural to think that the belief content is wholly determined by two facts: that FISH and SWIM compose the belief, and that the two concepts are combined with FISH as subject and SWIM as predicate. But this latter thought is not quite right. It omits any reference to the contents of FISH and SWIM, and these contents surely contribute to the determination of the belief content. The right thought is that the content is wholly determined by the following three facts: that FISH and SWIM compose the belief, that the two concepts are combined with FISH as subject and SWIM as predicate, and that the two concepts have the particular contents that they have. We can now say that, provisionally assuming the truth of Concepts as Representations, the content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if one or more concepts compose the state, and the content is wholly determined by which concepts compose the state, how the concepts are combined, and which contents the concepts have.

**Concepts as Senses.** According to Concepts as Senses, concepts are Fregean senses.<sup>3</sup> A Fregean sense is not a representation, but a part of a content. A Fregean sense determines another part of the content to which it belongs, the Fregean sense's corresponding Fregean reference. Consider once again the belief that fish swim. Once again, this belief's content is conceptual. If we provisionally assume the truth of Concepts as Senses, we will have to say that the content contains FISH and SWIM, which are the Fregean senses of "fish" and "swim," respectively. It is natural to suppose that the rest of the content is wholly determined by two facts: that FISH and SWIM compose the content, and that the two concepts are combined with FISH as subject and SWIM as predicate. But this thought is not quite right. For the thought omits any reference to the Fregean references corresponding to FISH and SWIM, and these Fregean references surely contribute to the determination of the rest of the content. The right thought is that the rest of the content is wholly determined by the following three facts: that FISH and SWIM compose the content, that the two concepts are combined with FISH as subject and SWIM as predicate, and that the two concepts have the particular, corresponding Fregean references that they have. It is trivial that the first two of these three facts wholly determine the part of the content containing just FISH and SWIM. Thus, the three facts together wholly determine the whole content. We can now say that, provisionally assuming the truth of Concepts as Senses, the content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if one or more concepts compose the content, and the content is wholly determined by which concepts compose the content, how the concepts are combined, and which Fregean references correspond to the concepts.

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<sup>3</sup> See Laurence and Margolis 1999, pp. 5 – 8, 75 – 77; and Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.3.

**Concepts as Abilities.** Some philosophers have suggested that concepts are abilities.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Concepts as Representations and Concepts as Senses, the meaning of Concepts as Abilities is not immediately clear. What, exactly, is TOMATO supposed to be the ability to do? I am aware of only two very explicit presentations of Concepts as Abilities, one by Hilary Putnam and one by Ruth Garrett Millikan.<sup>5</sup> Let's examine these two presentations in turn.

Putnam presents his account of the nature of concepts in the course of criticizing “magical theories of reference.” According to magical theories of reference, representations represent—or refer to—their contents *intrinsically*. In other words, for a given representation with a given content, it is necessary that the representation represents the content.<sup>6</sup> Putnam entertains and rejects the idea that concepts are mental representations that intrinsically represent their contents. He writes:

... to attribute a ‘concept’ or a ‘thought’ to someone is quite different from attributing any mental ‘presentation’, any introspectible entity or event, to him. Concepts are not mental presentations that intrinsically refer to external objects for the very decisive reason that they are not mental presentations at all. Concepts are signs used in a certain way; the signs may be public or private, mental entities or physical entities, but even when the signs are ‘mental’ and ‘private’, the sign itself apart from its use is not the concept. And signs do not themselves intrinsically refer.<sup>7</sup>

Putnam goes on to argue for the conclusion that “*concepts cannot be identical with mental objects of any kind*,” noting that by “mental object” he means “something introspectible.”<sup>8</sup> He gives two arguments for this conclusion. The first argument's premise says that, for any

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<sup>4</sup> See Laurence and Margolis 1999, p. 6, n. 3; and Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.2.

<sup>5</sup> Putnam 1981, pp. 17 – 21; and Millikan 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Putnam 1981, pp. 3 – 5.

<sup>7</sup> Putnam 1981, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Putnam 1981, pp. 20 – 21, italics in original.

given concept and any given mental object, it is possible for someone to possess the mental object without possessing the concept. To support this premise, Putnam describes a person with images of trees, of the word “tree,” of himself pointing to trees, and of the imperative sentence “Point to a tree.” Presumably, these images are mental objects that are identical to the concepts TREE and POINTING TO A TREE if any mental objects are. However, when this person is near trees, and someone says “Point to a tree,” the person does not know what he is supposed to do. The person lacks the ability to use his images in situationally appropriate ways. Putnam concludes that the person lacks the concept TREE, or at least the concept POINTING TO A TREE.<sup>9</sup> The second argument’s premise is that, for any given concept and any given mental object, it is possible for someone to possess the concept without possessing the mental object. To support this premise, Putnam describes a person who behaves, both verbally and non-verbally, like a normal, intelligent, English speaker. In particular, he regularly engages in intelligent English conversation. “But,” Putnam writes, “he never thinks (in words, images, etc.) when he is not speaking out loud; nor does anything ‘go through his head’, except that (of course) he hears his own voice speaking, and has the usual sense impressions from his surroundings, plus a general ‘feeling of understanding’.”<sup>10</sup> This person has the ability to use words in situationally appropriate ways, and so, Putnam concludes, he understands words and possesses concepts. However, Putnam holds that the person possesses no mental objects that it is plausible to identify with his concepts.<sup>11</sup> Putnam

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<sup>9</sup> Putnam 1981, pp. 19 – 21.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam 1981, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam 1981, pp. 20 – 21.

ends his discussion of concepts by stating that “concepts are (at least in part) *abilities* and not occurrences.”<sup>12</sup>

In context, it is clear that Putnam’s main concern in his discussion of concepts is to criticize magical theories of reference and the idea that there are mental representations that intrinsically refer to their contents. However, it is difficult to discern precisely what Putnam’s positive account of the nature of concepts is. He explicitly states that “concepts are signs used in a certain way,” and that the signs can be mental entities. Yet he also emphatically denies that concepts can be mental objects. He defines mental entities and objects as introspectible entities and objects, but it is unclear precisely which entities and objects he believes to be introspectible. (At one point he lists “words, images, feelings, etc.” as examples of “those ‘mental objects’ we *can* introspectively detect.”<sup>13</sup>) In particular, it is unclear whether he believes that we can introspect beliefs and other propositional attitudes. He also never explains the purpose of the parenthetical hedge in his claim that “concepts are (at least in part) *abilities*.” I find the following interpretation of Putnam’s discussion more plausible than any other: Concepts admit of a type-token distinction. A concept token is a sign token used in a certain way. The certain way is a “situationally appropriate” way, where part of what it is for a way to be situationally appropriate is for the use of a sign token in the way to suffice for the sign token to represent a content. A concept token can be a mental entity token, such as an image, or a non-mental entity token, such as a spoken word. A concept type is a sign type defined by a particular situationally appropriate way in which its tokens are used. A concept type cannot be a mental entity type, since a concept type can have both mental tokens and non-mental tokens. Concepts are in part abilities because one

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<sup>12</sup> Putnam 1981, p. 21, italics in original.

<sup>13</sup> Putnam 1981, p. 21, italics in original.

possesses a concept only if one uses a sign in a situationally appropriate way, and one uses a sign in a situationally appropriate way only if one has the ability to use the sign in a situationally appropriate way.

On the interpretation I have offered, Putnam's version of Concepts as Abilities is very similar to Concepts as Representations. Putnam holds that concepts are representations of a certain kind. And if we follow Putnam, Properties Etc. is a natural view of what the contents of concepts are. The only difference between Putnam's version of Concepts as Abilities and Concepts as Representations is that the former allows for both mental and non-mental concept tokens, while the latter allows only for mental concept tokens. In the present context, this difference seems insignificant. Hence we can conclude that Putnam's version of Concepts as Abilities effectively comes to the same thing as Concepts as Representations.

Millikan develops a theory of concepts of substances. The chief tenet of her theory is that substance concepts are abilities "to reidentify substances through diverse media and under diverse conditions, and ... over time to accumulate practical skills and theoretical knowledge about these substances and to use what we have learned."<sup>14</sup> In the following passage, she clearly states that her theory is compatible with Concepts as Representations:

There is another tradition that treats a theory of concepts as part of a theory of cognition by taking a concept to be a mental word. If one takes it that what makes a mental feature, or a brain feature, into a mental word is its function, then this usage of "concept" is not incompatible with my usage here. ... But if a substance concept is thought of as a mental word, it must constantly be borne in mind that the category "mental word for a substance," like the category "tool for scraping paint," is a function category. My claims will concern the function that defines this category. If a mental word for a substance is to serve a certain function, the cognitive systems that use it must have certain abilities. It is onto these abilities that I will turn the spotlight, often speaking of a substance concept simply as *being* an ability.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Millikan 2000, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Millikan 2000, p. 2, italics in original.



Here Millikan suggests that she really accepts Concepts as Representations, and that her explicit identification of substance concepts with abilities is merely a way of emphasizing the abilities associated with substance concepts. And, indeed, her overall presentation of her theory makes it clear that she does accept Concepts as Representations for substance concepts.<sup>16</sup> Hence Millikan's version of Concepts as Abilities is simply Concepts as Representations. The upshot of our discussions of Putnam and Millikan is that Concepts as Abilities effectively comes to the same thing as Concepts as Representations, and hence that there is no need to construct an additional definition of conceptuality for Concepts as Abilities.

We said earlier that, provisionally assuming the truth of Concepts as Representations, the content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if one or more concepts compose the state, and the content is wholly determined by which concepts compose the state, how the concepts are combined, and which contents the concepts have. We also said that, provisionally assuming the truth of Concepts as Senses, the content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if one or more concepts compose the content, and the content is wholly determined by which concepts compose the content, how the concepts are combined, and which Fregean references correspond to the concepts. Finally, we said that Concepts as Abilities effectively comes to the same thing as Concepts as Representations, and hence that there is no need to construct an additional definition of conceptuality for Concepts as Abilities. We are now in a position to complete the disjunctive definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality. Here are the definitions:

The content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if one or the other of the following two conditions holds:

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<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Millikan 2000, ch. 14, entitled "How Extensions of New Substance Concepts are Fixed: How Substance Concepts Acquire Intentionality."

Concepts as Representations or Concepts as Abilities is true, one or more concepts compose the state, and the content is completely determined by which concepts compose the state, how the concepts are combined, and which contents the concepts have.

Concepts as Senses is true, one or more concepts compose the content, and the content is completely determined by which concepts compose the content, how the concepts are combined, and which Fregean references correspond to the concepts.

The content of a mental state is non-conceptual if and only if it is not conceptual.

I claim that the disjunctive definitions do a good job of elucidating the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, and that all or almost all philosophers can accept the definitions consistently with their existing theoretical commitments. I also anticipate two objections to the definitions. The first is that the definition of conceptuality, being disjunctive, is disunified. I reply that there is an isomorphism between the disjuncts that provides ample unity. The second objection is that, on the disjunctive definitions, all mental contents will be non-conceptual if Concepts as Representations, Concepts as Senses, and Concepts as Abilities are all false. I reply by, first, acknowledging that the disjunctive definitions presume the truth of at least one of these accounts of the nature of concepts. However, I also insist that the presumption is justified, since philosophers seem to have proposed no other plausible account of the nature of concepts.

I now turn to consideration of three other pairs of definitions—each pair containing a definition of conceptuality and a definition of non-conceptuality—current in the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism. The first pair is usually called the “state” definitions. The second and third pairs are usually conflated and both called the “content” definitions. I distinguish the second and third pairs and call them the “kind-of-content” definitions and the “constitution-of-content” definitions, respectively. I argue that each of these three pairs of

definitions is inferior to the disjunctive definitions, in the sense of doing a worse job of elucidating the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, being consistent with fewer philosophers' existing theoretical commitments, or being unacceptable for some other reason. What ultimately makes the disjunctive definitions superior to these other pairs of definitions, I contend, is that the disjunctive definitions are constructed by confronting the topic of the nature of concepts head on. By contrast, the other pairs of definitions are constructed with an eye toward avoiding any confrontation with this topic, or else they blithely prejudge a contentious question on the topic.

## *2. The State Definitions*

The state definitions are so called because, according to them, a mental content's conceptuality or non-conceptuality depends on the mental state of which it is a content. Hence, conceptuality and non-conceptuality are properties contents have relative to states having them as contents. A given content can be conceptual relative to one state and non-conceptual relative to another state. For this reason, some philosophers have complained that, on the state definitions, it would be more reasonable to ascribe conceptuality and non-conceptuality to states than to contents.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, at least one philosopher explicitly defines the properties as properties of states.<sup>18</sup>

The state definitions derive, ultimately, from Adrian Cussins.<sup>19</sup> However, Cussins' statement of the definitions is complex and hard to grasp, and his explication of the definitions is almost certainly confused. Shortly after Cussins published his definitions, they

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<sup>17</sup> Byrne 2005, §1.3; and Heck 2000, pp. 484 – 485.

<sup>18</sup> Toribio, 2008, p. 354.

<sup>19</sup> Cussins 1990, pp. 382 – 384.

were refined by Tim Crane, and more recent statements of the definitions generally derive from Crane's. Here is what Crane writes:

For any state with content, *S*, *S* has a nonconceptual content, *P*, iff a subject *X*'s being in *S* does not entail that *X* possesses the concepts that canonically characterise *P*. ... A state with conceptual content, *C*, may be defined in terms of the conditional: if *X* is in *C*, then *X* possesses the concepts that canonically characterise *C*.<sup>20</sup>

The contemporary literature on conceptualism is replete with similar definitions. Here are some examples:

A state has nonconceptual content just if the subject of that state need not have all the concepts that a theorist would use to give a canonical specification of that state's content.<sup>21</sup>

Mental state *M* has non-conceptual content *p* iff it is possible to be in *M* without possessing all the concepts that characterize *p*. ... If *M* does not have non-conceptual content, then it has *conceptual* content: anyone who is in *M* must possess all the concepts that characterize *p*. ...<sup>22</sup>

Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a conceptual content iff in order for *S* to be undergoing *e*, *S* must possess the concepts that characterize *p*. ... Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a nonconceptual content iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to be undergoing *e*, *S* must possess the concepts that characterize *p*.<sup>23</sup>

... a thinker is in a mental state with ... conceptual content, if, in order to be in a state with that content, the thinker must possess and deploy the concepts required to adequately describe or specify that content. A thinker is in a state with nonconceptual content if he can be in a state with that content without possessing or deploying the concepts which specify that content.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Crane 1992, pp. 143 – 144.

<sup>21</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Byrne 2005, p. 233.

<sup>23</sup> Crowther 2006, p. 252.

<sup>24</sup> Roskies 2008, p. 650.

... a visual experience *E* has a nonconceptual content if and only if (i) *E* has correctness conditions; (ii) the subject of *E* need not possess the concepts used in a canonical specification of *E*'s correctness conditions.<sup>25</sup>

While the above statements of the state definitions vary in their precise wording, they all seem to express the same basic idea: For every content, there are certain concepts that “canonically characterize” the content. The content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if being in the state requires possessing all the concepts that canonically characterize the content.

Most philosophers who discuss the state definitions leave undefined the notion of a concept canonically characterizing a content. But Alex Byrne does make an explicit attempt to define this notion. He omits the adverb “canonically” and speaks simply of a concept characterizing a content. Limiting his definition to propositional contents, he writes “the concept *F* characterizes the proposition *p* iff *p* = that ... *F* ...”<sup>26</sup> This definition won’t do as stated. The concept FISH characterizes the proposition that fish swim, but this proposition is not identical to that ... FISH ... for any filling of the dots. What the proposition is identical to is that ... fish ... for some filling of the dots. Presumably what Byrne means to say is something like this: the concept *F* characterizes the proposition *p* iff *p* = that ... *f* ..., where *f* is a word “expressing” *F*.

It seems to me that every philosopher who discusses the state definitions, and speaks of a concept canonically characterizing a content, is tacitly referring to words and a relation of expression between them and concepts. A paradigm example of a conceptual content is the content of the belief that fish swim. The concepts that canonically characterize this content are FISH and SWIM. Presumably, what makes these two concepts the concepts that

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<sup>25</sup> Tye 2009, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> Byrne 2005, p. 233, ellipses in original.

canonically characterize the content is the fact that they are expressed by the words “fish” and “swim,” which are the words composing the sentence “fish swim.” Why does the sentence “fish swim” determine which concepts canonically characterize the content of the belief that fish swim? A natural answer is that the sentence follows the word “that” in the expression “the belief that fish swim,” which is the standard way of referring to the belief that fish swim. But this natural answer seems to be mistaken. The state definitions presuppose that there are concepts canonically characterizing every mental content, including experiential contents. The standard way of referring to an experience is with an expression like “an experience of a red round tomato,” which does not contain the word “that.” The content of a belief can always be directly “read off” the expression standardly used to refer to it. The content of the belief that P is always that P. It is far from obvious that the same goes for experiences. For instance, it is debatable whether a tomato, or the property of tomatohood, belongs to the content of an experience of a red round tomato. It seems that the sentence “fish swim” determines which concepts canonically characterize the content of the belief that fish swim, not because the sentence follows the word “that” in the expression “the belief that fish swim,” but because the sentence has the same content as the belief that fish swim. In general, it seems that the best way to understand the notion of a concept canonically characterizing a mental content is as a concept expressed by a word in a sentence or other linguistic expression with the mental content as its content.

Some of the above statements of the state definitions refer to a “canonical specification” of a mental content and to concepts “used to give,” or “used in,” a canonical specification. It seems that the best way to understand the notion of a canonical specification of a mental content is as a linguistic expression with the mental content as its content. And it

seems that the best way to understand the notion of a concept used to give, or used in, a canonical specification is as a concept expressed by a word in the canonical specification. Plainly, the concepts used to give, or used in, a canonical specification of a mental content are the concepts that canonically characterize the mental content.

The state definitions may well be adequate in the sense that there are no counterexamples to them and they are non-circular. But they do a poor job of elucidating the natures of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, and of bringing out the essences of these properties. The definitions are constructed around incidental features of what they define. We are told that the content of a mental state is conceptual if and only if being in the state requires possessing certain concepts, *viz.*, the concepts that canonically characterize the content. This definition manifests an unwillingness to tell the whole story, and, indeed, an unwillingness to tell the most important part of the story. We are left wondering *why* the subject of the mental state is required to possess the concepts that canonically characterize the content. What exactly does the subject *do* with these concepts, in relation to the mental state and the content, that requires the subject to possess the concepts? On this matter the state definitions leave us entirely in the dark. To be fair, one of the above statements of the state definitions does provide a little illumination. The statement in question states that being in a mental state with a conceptual content requires possessing and *deploying* the concepts that canonically characterize the content. This reference to deploying concepts provides a little illumination, but only a little. We are still left wondering what it is to deploy concepts and how such deployment might relate to a mental state and its content.

The disjunctive definitions provide abundant illumination. When the disjunctive definition of conceptuality tells us what it is for the content of a mental state to be

conceptual, it tells a detailed story about the nature of concepts and how concepts relate—via relations of composition and determination—to the mental state and the content. The story implies that the subject of the mental state possesses certain concepts, but the focus of the story is on what the subject does with the concepts, in relation to the mental state and its content, that requires the subject to possess the concepts. And this story can also serve as an account of what it is to deploy concepts in relation to a mental state and its content.

Admittedly, the disjunctive definition of conceptuality actually tells the disjunction of two stories. But, as I have already observed, there is an isomorphism between the disjuncts that unifies the definition and the story it tells.

It might be thought that there is one respect in which the state definitions are more illuminating than the disjunctive definitions. The disjunctive definition of conceptuality tells us that what it is for the content of a mental state to be conceptual is for the mental state and the content to bear a certain relation to concepts, but the definition never specifies which particular concepts the relation is borne to. By contrast, the state definition of conceptuality does specify which particular concepts the subject of a mental state with a conceptual content is required to possess—the concepts that canonically characterize the content. I deny that this specification by the state definitions provides any illumination not provided by the disjunctive definitions. For when we unpack the notion of a concept that canonically characterizes a mental content, we find that it is just the notion of a concept expressed by a word in a linguistic expression with the mental content as its content. The disjunctive definition of conceptuality tells us that what it is for the content of a mental state to be conceptual is for the mental state and the content to bear a certain relation to concepts. To be told that the particular concepts to which the relation is borne are the concepts expressed by



the words in a linguistic expression with the mental content as its content is not illuminating but banal. Of course, it would be very illuminating to be given a general procedure for ascertaining, in the case of any given mental content, which particular linguistic expression has the mental content as its content. But neither the state definitions nor the disjunctive definitions provide such a procedure.

Once again, the disjunctive definition of conceptuality tells us that what it is for the content of a mental state to be conceptual is for the mental state and the content to bear a certain relation to concepts. I claim that it is not illuminating but banal to be told that the particular concepts to which the relation is borne are the concepts that canonically characterize the content. But if I am wrong, the case for the superiority of some version of the disjunctive definitions to the state definitions is not undermined. For we can easily modify the disjunctive definition of conceptuality to say that what it is for the content of a mental state to be conceptual is for the mental state and the content to bear a certain relation to the concepts that canonically characterize the content. The state definitions would provide no illumination not provided by the modified disjunctive definitions.

### *3. The Kind-of-Content Definitions*

The literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism recognizes an alternative to the state definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, a pair of definitions usually called the “content” definitions. However, the literature actually conflates two different pairs of definitions under this rubric. I call them the “kind-of-content” definitions and the “constitution-of-content” definitions. According to both pairs of definitions, conceptuality and non-conceptuality are intrinsic properties of mental contents, rather than properties mental contents have relative to mental states having them as contents.

Both the kind-of-content definitions and the constitution-of-content definitions derive from Richard Heck, who describes a version of non-conceptualism he calls the “content view.” According to the content view, “the content of perceptual states is different in kind from that of cognitive states like belief: The former is nonconceptual; the latter, conceptual.”<sup>27</sup> In a footnote attached to this quote, Heck writes “Jim Pryor suggested to me that it might be better to speak of ‘conceptually-constituted content’ and ‘nonconceptually-constituted content.’ This seems reasonable.”<sup>28</sup> What Heck is suggesting here, whether he realizes it or not, are two different pairs of definitions. The first pair, which is what I call the “kind-of-content” definitions, is this: A content is conceptual if and only if it is of the same kind as a belief content, and a content is non-conceptual if and only if it is different in kind from a belief content. The second pair, which is what I call the “constitution-of-content” definitions, is this: A content is conceptual if and only if it is constituted by concepts, and a content is non-conceptual if and only if it is not constituted by concepts. Statements of the kind-of-content definitions and constitution-of-content definitions are common in the contemporary literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism. Here are some examples:

Non-conceptual content is *not* conceptual content, where the latter is characterized either as belief content, or as content with concepts ... as constituents.<sup>29</sup>

Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a conceptual content [iff] *p* is composed of concepts. ... Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a nonconceptual content iff it is not the case that *p* is composed of concepts.<sup>30</sup>

... conceptual content is content of a kind that can be the content of judgment and belief. Concepts are constituents of those intentional contents which can be the complete, truth-evaluable, contents of judgment and belief.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Heck 2000, p. 485.

<sup>28</sup> Heck 2000, pp. 485 – 486, n. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Byrne 2005, p. 233.

<sup>30</sup> Crowther 2006, p. 250.

A mental state has ... nonconceptual content if and only if the mental state has a different kind of content than do beliefs, thoughts, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

Conceptual content has constituents that conform to Frege's criterion of identity for senses. They are Fregean concepts. ... nonconceptual ways of representing the world ... are not composed of (Fregean) concepts. ... For any perceptual experience *E* with content *C*, *C* is [nonconceptual] iff *C* is essentially different in kind to the content of beliefs.<sup>33</sup>

I examine the kind-of-content definitions in the remainder of this section, and the constitution-of-content definitions in the next section.

The kind-of-content definitions state that a content is conceptual if and only if it is of the same kind as a belief content, and that a content is non-conceptual if and only if it is different in kind from a belief content. These definitions raise an immediate worry: They're definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, but they say nothing about *concepts*. The proponent of the definitions might try to shrug this worry off. "It is a little surprising," the proponent might admit, "that definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality should make no reference to concepts. But the definitions face no obvious counterexamples, and they are non-circular and informative. Hence, we should accept them." The worry cannot be shrugged off this easily, however. For a cursory glance at the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism shows that the chief arguments for non-conceptualism rely essentially on premises concerning concepts and concept possession. If we adopt the kind-of-content definitions, these arguments lose any appearance of validity and, indeed, cease to make any sense. Surely one desideratum for definitions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality is that

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<sup>31</sup> Peacocke 2001a, p. 243.

<sup>32</sup> Speaks 2005, p. 360.

<sup>33</sup> Toribio 2008, pp. 352 – 354.

they should make sense—not non-sense—of the chief arguments in the debate between conceptualism and non-conceptualism.

To review, the two most prominent arguments for non-conceptualism are the animal-infant argument and the fineness-of-grain argument. The animal-infant argument states that some non-human animals or human infants have experiences, but either lack concepts altogether or lack concepts for some of the things their experiences represent. In its most common form, the fineness-of-grain argument points to our ability to make very fine-grained perceptual discriminations, *e.g.*, our ability to discriminate, visually, between very similar shades of red. The argument is that we can, and do, perceptually discriminate far more properties than we possess concepts for, so our experiences can, and do, represent far more properties than we possess concepts for. Plainly, neither of these arguments makes sense as an argument for non-conceptualism if non-conceptual contents are defined without reference to concepts or concept possession.<sup>34</sup>

The two non-conceptualist arguments just considered seem to aim to establish non-conceptualism with non-conceptuality defined according to the state definition. This version of non-conceptualism is sometimes called “state non-conceptualism.” José Bermúdez argues that this version of non-conceptualism actually entails non-conceptualism with non-conceptuality defined according to the content definitions—“content non-conceptualism.”<sup>35</sup> Bermúdez does not clearly distinguish between the kind-of-content definitions and the constitution-of content definitions, but he seems to be working with the kind-of-content definitions. If the entailment from state non-conceptualism to “kind-of-content non-conceptualism” holds, then the animal-infant argument and the fineness-of-grain argument

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<sup>34</sup> Jeff Speaks (2005, pp. 365 – 366) makes this point.

<sup>35</sup> Bermúdez 2007, §IV.

actually do make sense as arguments for kind-of-content non-conceptualism. Hence, we need to examine Bermúdez's arguments for the claim that state non-conceptualism entails kind-of-content non-conceptualism.

Bermúdez makes three arguments for this claim. All three begin by imagining a position combining state non-conceptualism with the negation of kind-of-content non-conceptualism. According to this position, beliefs and experiences have the same kind of content; but having a belief implies the possession of the concepts that canonically characterize the content, while having an experience has no such implication. Each argument aims to show that the imagined position is unacceptable.

Bermúdez's first argument identifies two candidates for the kinds of things contents are. (There is no need to specify the contents as belief contents or experiential contents, since we are imagining a position on which both states have the same kind of content.) The two candidates are complexes of concepts and sets of possible worlds. It is hard to identify experiential contents with complexes of concepts on the imagined view. For, on the imagined view, one can have an experience without possessing the concepts that canonically characterize its content. If the content is a complex of concepts, then presumably the canonically characterizing concepts are the concepts composing the content. Thus, if experiential contents are complexes of concepts, and the imagined view is true, then one can have a state with a certain concept as part of its content without possessing the concept. This consequence is very hard to accept. It therefore appears that the proponent of the imagined view must identify contents with sets of possible worlds. But this identification is very implausible, Bermúdez argues. Here's what he writes:

The notion of perceptual content is supposed to reflect how the distal environment perceptually appears to the perceiving subject. But what could it possibly mean to say

that the distal environment perceptually appears as a set of possible worlds? There is some plausibility in the idea that belief contents can be understood in terms of possible worlds. One might think, for example, that to believe that *p* is essentially to partition all the ways that things could be into those compatible with *p* and those not. But how can this be carried over to the content of perception? How could any such machinery adequately capture how things perceptually appear to the subject?<sup>36</sup>

The upshot of Bermúdez’s argument seems to be that the imagined view must be wrong because the view’s proponent cannot identify contents with either complexes of concepts or sets of possible worlds.<sup>37</sup>

This argument seems to have two major flaws. First, it assumes that contents must be either complexes of concepts or sets of possible worlds. But there are other candidates. For example, contents might consist of Fregean senses or Fregean thoughts. It is true that many philosophers identify Fregean senses with concepts, but this identification is optional.<sup>38</sup> One could perfectly coherently identify Fregean senses with contents, and concepts with vehicles of content. Second, the argument against identifying experiential contents with sets of possible worlds just seems confused. Bermúdez rhetorically asks “what could it possibly mean to say that the distal environment perceptually appears as a set of possible worlds?” But the identification of experiential contents with sets of possible worlds does not imply that the distal environment perceptually appears as a set of possible worlds. The proponent of such an identification holds that what it is for the environment to appear red, say, is for the subject to be related in a certain way to the set of all possible worlds in which the environment is red. It simply does not follow from this claim that in such a case the

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<sup>36</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> See Laurence and Margolis 1999, pp. 5 – 8, 75 – 77; and Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.3.

environment appears to the subject as the set of all possible worlds in which the environment is red.

Bermúdez's second argument is this:

... the perceptual discriminations that a subject can make are a function of how things look to her—that is, they are a function of what she perceives, or, in the terms we have been using, of the content of her perception. But it is hard to see where these explanations are going to bottom out on the [imagined] view. How can the fact that the subject stands in a certain relation to a complex of concepts or a set of possible worlds explain her ability to make perceptual discriminations?<sup>39</sup>

The idea here seems to be that the imagined view must identify experiential contents with either complexes of concepts or sets of possible worlds. But neither identification satisfactorily explains the subject's discriminative abilities. Since the abilities must be explained by experiential contents, the imagined view is unacceptable. My only objection to this argument is that it seems to prove too much; it seems to prove that any account of the nature of experiential contents is unacceptable. Suppose that some account identified experiential contents with Xs. Couldn't we ask, following Bermúdez, how the fact that the subject stands in a certain relation to Xs can explain her ability to make perceptual discriminations? We obviously could, and this question would seem to have as much force against the view that experiential contents are Xs as it has against the view that experiential contents are complexes of concepts or sets of possible worlds. But, of course, experiential contents must be Xs for some value of "X."

Bermúdez's third argument is that it is impossible for the proponent of the imagined view to explain why having a belief implies possessing the concepts that canonically characterize the belief content (or why beliefs are "concept-dependent") while having an experience has no such implication (or why experiences are "concept-independent"). This

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<sup>39</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 68.

difference cannot be explained by appeal to a difference in kind of content, since on the imagined view beliefs and experiences have the same kind of content. Bermúdez sees only two other possible explanations: a difference in functional role between the two types of state, and a difference in phenomenology. He argues that neither explanation can be successful.<sup>40</sup> I agree with his argument in regard to phenomenology, so I will focus only on what he says about functional role. Here is what he writes:

The appeal to functional role appears to be restating the problem rather than providing an explanation. Since it is part of the functional role of belief that it is concept-dependent (so that, for example, one cannot form beliefs about matters that are beyond one's conceptual grasp), and part of the functional role of perception that it is concept-independent (so that one can react to objects that one perceives even though one cannot conceptualize them), there seems to be no prospect of explaining concept-(in)dependence in terms of functional role.<sup>41</sup>

The idea here seems to be that, if beliefs are concept-dependent while experiences are concept-independent, there must be an explanation of this difference. Once we've disposed of the possibility of a phenomenological explanation, the only other possible explanation is functional. But a functional explanation is unacceptable, for the *explanans* is "too close" to the *explanandum* to be explanatory.

This reasoning is unconvincing. Consider the fact that all bachelors are unmarried while all husbands are married. What is the explanation of this difference? A natural answer is that it's just part of what it is to be a bachelor to be unmarried, while it's just part of what it is to be a husband to be married. Perhaps this is a satisfactory explanation, and perhaps it isn't on account of the "closeness" between the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. But if the closeness prevents the explanation from being satisfactory, then it seems that we should say that there is no satisfactory explanation to be had, and that the difference between bachelors

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<sup>40</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Bermúdez 2007, p. 68.



and husbands in question simply doesn't stand in need of explanation. Likewise, it may be a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the concept-dependence of beliefs and the concept-independence of experiences that (a) beliefs are defined by their functional role, and it's just part of a belief's functional role to be concept-dependent, while (b) experiences are defined by their functional role, and it's just part of an experience's functional role to be concept-independent. If this is not a satisfactory explanation, then the proponent of the imagined view can reasonably hold that there is no satisfactory explanation to be had, and that the difference between beliefs and experiences in question simply doesn't stand in need of explanation. All three of Bermúdez's arguments against the imagined view fail, so he does not establish that state non-conceptualism entails kind-of-content non-conceptualism.<sup>42</sup>

#### *4. The Constitution-of-Content Definitions*

It remains to consider the constitution-of-content definitions, according to which a content is conceptual if and only if it is constituted by concepts, and a content is non-conceptual if and only if it is not constituted by concepts. The main problem with these definitions is that they prejudge a contentious question about the nature of concepts. They assume that concepts are the kinds of things that constitute contents, rather than the kinds of things that constitute vehicles of content. But both of these views about the nature of concepts are philosophically respectable and widely held.<sup>43</sup> If at all possible, we should try to understand the debate between conceptualism and non-conceptualism in terms that are neutral with regard to the nature of concepts.

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<sup>42</sup> Josefa Toribio (2008) also argues that the entailment holds. Her reasoning is somewhat hard to follow, but she generally seems to follow Bermúdez, and her reasoning seems to suffer from the same flaws.

<sup>43</sup> See Margolis and Laurence 2008, §1.

A second problem with the constitution-of-content definitions lies in an ambiguity in the expression “constituted by concepts.” This expression can mean either “wholly constituted by concepts” or “at least partly constituted by concepts.” Suppose that it is the former. It is then debatable whether belief contents count as conceptual on the constitution-of-content definitions. Some philosophers might identify concepts with Fregean senses, and hold that belief contents have a two-tiered structure, with Fregean senses and Fregean thoughts in the top tier and Russellian propositions or sets of possible worlds in the bottom tier.<sup>44</sup> If these philosophers also wished to hold that belief contents are conceptual—as most philosophers do—then the constitution-of-content definitions would simply beg the question against them. Suppose now that “constituted by concepts” means “at least partly constituted by concepts.” The problem now is that some philosophers standardly identified as non-conceptualists hold that experiential contents are partly constituted by concepts—Christopher Peacocke is the clearest example.<sup>45</sup> I conclude that the constitution-of-content definitions are unacceptable.

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<sup>44</sup> Philosophers who might fit this description include Christopher Peacocke (1992b, pp. 2 – 3, 14, 16 – 17, 22 – 24, 43) and Edward Zalta (2001, p. 335, §2, pp. 345 – 346).

<sup>45</sup> See Peacocke 1992a, pp. 123 – 126; Peacocke 1992b, pp. 73, 80 – 81, 85, 88 – 90.

## **PART II**

### **ARGUMENTS FOR NON-CONCEPTUALISM**

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ANIMAL-INFANT ARGUMENT

This part of the dissertation, which comprises this chapter and the next two, examines and criticizes three arguments for non-conceptualism: the animal-infant argument, the fineness-of-grain argument, and the learning argument. This chapter focuses on the animal-infant argument, and the next two chapters focus on the fineness-of-grain and learning arguments, respectively.

The animal-infant argument states that some non-human animals or human infants have experiences, but either lack concepts altogether or lack concepts for some of the things their experiences represent. Therefore, some experiences have non-conceptual contents.<sup>1</sup> For ease of expression, I will generally use the term “animal” to mean “non-human animal,” and the term “infant” to mean “human infant.” The best way to approach the animal-infant argument is to divide it into two forms: a broad form according to which some animals or infants have experiences but lack concepts altogether, and a narrow form according to which some animals or infants have experiences but lack concepts for some of the things their experiences represent. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the broad form of the animal-infant argument, and the second section focuses on the narrow form.

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<sup>1</sup> The animal-infant argument derives from Evans 1982, p. 124; and McDowell 1994, esp. Lecture III. Contemporary proponents of the argument include José Bermúdez, Christopher Peacocke and Michael Tye; see Bermúdez 1995, §1.3; Bermúdez 1998, §3.3; Peacocke 2001a, pp. 260 – 261; Peacocke 2001b, pp. 613 – 614; and Tye 2005, pp. 225 – 226. For more discussion, see Bermúdez 2007, pp. 63 – 64; Brewer 1999, §5.3.4; Byrne 2005, §2.2; Collins 1998; and McDowell 1998, pp. 409 – 414.

### *1. The Broad Animal-Infant Argument*

According to the broad form of the animal-infant argument, some animals or infants have experiences but lack concepts altogether. In evaluating this argument, it will be helpful to break down the class of animals and infants into three sub-classes: lower animals, higher animals, and infants. The distinction between lower and higher animals requires some explication. By “higher animals” I mean animals that are relatively intelligent and relatively closely related to human beings. Mammals like dogs, cats, and primates are the primary examples. By “lower animals” I mean animals that are relatively unintelligent and relatively distantly related to human beings. Insects are the primary examples here. This explication is quite vague, I acknowledge, but it’s clear enough for present purposes.

Let’s look first at lower animals. Are there lower animals with experiences but no concepts? The most likely candidates are unintelligent insects with rigid behavioral patterns. Peter Carruthers describes a number of examples, including caterpillars:

... there are the caterpillars who follow the light to climb trees to find food, in whom the mechanism that enables them to do this is an extremely simple one: when more light enters one eye than the other, the legs on that side of its body move slower, causing the animal to turn towards the source of the light. When artificial lighting is provided at the bottom of the trees, the caterpillars climb downwards and subsequently starve to death. And when blinded in one eye, these animals will move constantly in circles. How dumb can you be! Right?<sup>2</sup>

Caterpillars are extremely dumb, no doubt. Still, I don’t feel certain that they possess no concepts. Maybe caterpillars possess only a few concepts, and use them only in very rigid ways. Insofar as I am tempted to deny concepts to caterpillars, I am also tempted to deny them mentality altogether—to affirm that they are unthinking, unfeeling, unconscious

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<sup>2</sup> Carruthers 2004, p. 211. Carruthers describes more examples of rigid insect behavior on pp. 211 – 212. He goes on to argue that honey bees have beliefs and desires, and therefore concepts, and he suggests (on p. 213) that his conclusion will generalize to all navigating insects.

automata.<sup>3</sup> But if caterpillars are automata, then they have no experiences, and they pose no threat to conceptualism. All in all, it's unclear what we should say about the caterpillar mind. But it's clear that we're not justified in saying that caterpillars have experiences but no concepts. And in general, I think we're not justified in saying of any lower animal that it has experiences but no concepts.

It's hard to deny that higher animals, such as dogs, perceive and have experiences. At the same time, though, common sense seems to dictate that higher animals have concepts. We quite naturally ascribe thoughts and beliefs to higher animals. We might say of a dog, for example, that it's barking up a certain tree because it thinks (or believes) that a cat went up the tree.<sup>4</sup> At this point, the non-conceptualist might try to identify an "intermediate" animal, one that lies on the borderline between our (vague) categories of lower and higher animals, and to claim that this animal has experiences but no concepts. A fish is a good example. The problem with this ploy is the same problem we encountered in the case of the caterpillar. It's simply not clear that fish and other intermediate animals *both* have experiences *and* lack concepts. Insofar as I have intuitions about the mentality of fish (which is not very far), those intuitions do not point in opposite directions with regard to experiences and concepts. Perhaps fish are mindless automata, perhaps they are fully minded creatures with both experiences and concepts, and perhaps they have experiences without concepts. My intuitions simply deliver no clear verdict on the matter.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Tye denies phenomenal consciousness to caterpillars, and seems to deny them mentality altogether. See Tye 2000, pp. 173 – 174.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm 1972, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> See Tye 2000, pp. 174 – 178, for a discussion of the mentality of fish.

Infants are a more difficult case for the conceptualist, especially newborn infants. No one will deny that infants perceive and have experiences, but newborns exhibit so little intelligent behavior that it might seem reasonable to deny them concepts. However, denying concepts to newborns will seem less reasonable if we note the distinction between absence of evidence and evidence of absence. If newborns exhibited the intelligent behavior of an adult dog or an adult human, that behavior would be very good evidence that newborns had concepts. But the fact that newborns exhibit no intelligent behavior is not evidence that they have no concepts. For all we can tell, newborns could have concepts, but simply be unable to evince their concept possession through intelligent behavior.

In general, a creature's failure to exhibit intelligent behavior is, in itself, no evidence that the creature lacks concepts. I will go even further and assert that a creature's *lack of intelligence* is, in itself, no evidence that the creature lacks concepts. Unintelligence might be evidence that a creature's conceptual capacities are at best feeble, but unintelligence alone gives us no grounds for denying that a creature has a few concepts and the ability to use them in a few simple ways.<sup>6</sup> If attributing concepts to unintelligent creatures means attributing abstract thoughts to them, then so be it. If it means attributing reasoning and inferences to them, then so be it. So long as the abstract thoughts and inferences are few and unsophisticated, their presence in the creature's mind will be consistent with the creature's unintelligence. (An example of an unsophisticated abstract thought might be "Some things are warm." An example of an unsophisticated inference might be the inference of "Some things are warm" from "Some things are warm and soft.") Phrases like "abstract thought" and "reasoning" have, I admit, associations with the adult human mind. But these associations are *mere* associations, extraneous to the strict meanings of the phrases. We

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<sup>6</sup> See Carruthers 2009.

associate abstract thought and reasoning with adult humans because abstract thought and reasoning, in large amounts, are among adult humans' most distinctive features; and because the most impressive and salient examples of abstract thought and reasoning (*e.g.*, mathematical proofs) are available only to adult humans. Nonetheless, there is no absurdity in attributing a small amount of abstract thought and reasoning to unintelligent creatures. And if we can attribute abstract thought and reasoning to unintelligent creatures without absurdity, then we can attribute concepts to them as well.

I know that the line I am taking will make some philosophers uneasy. If animals and infants have concepts, then there must be some particular concepts that they have. But it seems impossible for us ever to ascertain which concepts those are. There is an anti-realist intuition that says that facts we *in principle* cannot know are no facts at all. If this intuition is correct, then there are no particular concepts that animals and infants have, and so animals and infants have no concepts. This is not the place to undertake a detailed critique of anti-realism. I will simply make two observations for the benefit of those moved by the anti-realist intuition. The first is that the anti-realist intuition must always be tempered by consideration of the vagueness of the phrase "in principle," and by consideration of the contrary realist intuition: that the world was not made to be known by us, and our epistemic powers impose no constraint on the reality beyond our minds. The second observation concerns the claim that we can never know which particular concepts animals and infants have. This claim is problematic, because it's unclear how strictly we should interpret the word "know." Perhaps we can never know with certainty which concepts animals and infants have, but that doesn't mean we're condemned to cluelessness. We may still be able to speculate reasonably. If our reasonable speculations are (by and large) correct, then perhaps



we can be said to “know” which concepts animals and infants have. At the very least, we will be in a state resembling knowledge.

Let me develop this second observation by engaging in what I believe to be some reasonable speculation about which concepts animals and infants have. I will focus on newborn infants, since I have already acknowledged that they pose the hardest case for conceptualism. If a newborn has conceptual thoughts, what might those thoughts be concerned with? A plausible answer is that the newborn’s thoughts are concerned with the newborn itself, its body, and what it immediately senses in its environment. Hence, a newborn might have the concept SELF, or ME. It might have concepts of some of its body parts, such as HEAD, TORSO, ARM, and LEG. The newborn might have some egocentric spatial concepts, such as UP, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT, NEAR, and FAR. It might have concepts of some of its own bodily states, such as HUNGRY and SATIATED, and it might have the concepts PLEASURE and PAIN. It might have the concept FOOD. It might have concepts of sensible qualities in its environment, such as HOT, WARM, COOL, COLD, HARD, SOFT, ROUGH, and SMOOTH. It might have the concept LIGHT and the related concepts BRIGHT and DARK, and the concept SOUND and the related concepts LOUD and QUIET. It might have the concepts TASTE and SMELL. The newborn might have some simple degree concepts, such as VERY, MUCH, LITTLE, MORE, and LESS, and some simple numerical concepts, such as ONE and MANY. It might have some simple evaluative concepts, such as GOOD and BAD. It might have concepts of some of its own actions, such as SUCK, SWALLOW, and CRY. The newborn might have the generic concepts THING and OBJECT, as well as some simple syncategorematic concepts, such as NOT, AND, OR, SOME, ALL, SAME, and DIFFERENT. This is all just speculation. I am by no means

certain that newborns have all or any of the concepts I have just named. Nonetheless, my speculation is reasonable; it's not random, unprincipled guessing. If I am by and large correct, and newborns do have many of the concepts I've named, then I can't be described as clueless about which concepts they have. Perhaps my state is one of knowledge, and perhaps it isn't. The important point is that we are not necessarily clueless about which concepts animals and infants have, and this point undermines—to a degree—the force of the inference from the anti-realist intuition to the conclusion that animals and infants have no concepts.

I just gave some specific examples of concepts I believe animals and infants might have. At this point, we need to pause to dispel a certain temptation that might arise among proponents of the animal-infant argument. In general, proponents want to accuse the conceptualist of over-intellectualizing animals and infants. The accusation is hard to sustain when the conceptualist affirms only the vague, general claim that animals and infants have a few concepts. But when the conceptualist finally goes out on a limb and suggests that animals and infants have some specific concept, proponents might sense opportunity. The temptation can arise to exaggerate the intellectual sophistication of the concept mentioned, and to insist, without justification, that the intellectual requirements for its possession are quite demanding. Eagerness to accuse the conceptualist of over-intellectualizing animals and infants can lead proponents to over-intellectualize the concepts the conceptualist attributes to animals and infants. For example, I can imagine a proponent balking at my suggestion that an infant might have the concept SELF. Such a proponent might insist that in order to have SELF, one must conceive of oneself as an entity with a subjective perspective on an objective world, a world of which one is a part and whose nature is independent of one's beliefs about it. Infants, of course, know nothing of subjectivity, objectivity, or belief-independence. To

take another example, a proponent might say that one can have the concept HOT only if one knows something about the causes and effects of heat, *e.g.*, that it's produced by fire and tends to melt things. Obviously, most infants know nothing of fire or melting. Perhaps these claims about the possession requirements for SELF and HOT are true, but they're not obviously true. Granted, we adult humans have grasped certain philosophical truths about selfhood—that it involves a certain interplay of subjectivity and objectivity—and it may even be true to say that these truths are part of our concept of the self. But it's far from clear that one must grasp these truths in order to have the concept SELF at all. Perhaps having SELF requires one only to be a conscious self. Similarly, we adult humans know about the causes and effects of heat, and this knowledge may be part of our concept of heat. But having the concept at all may require no more than having felt heat and being able to recognize it when one feels it again. And this recognitional ability may amount to no more than a disposition to enter into a certain neural or functional state upon feeling heat.

Let's shift gears a bit. When discussing animal and infant concept possession, the elephant in the room is, of course, language. Some philosophers have argued that a creature without language cannot possess thoughts, beliefs, or concepts. Typically, such arguments depend on highly contentious premises that are either poorly supported, or supported only by some broader, highly contentious philosophical theory. To take an example, Donald Davidson argues that a creature without language can have no beliefs.<sup>7</sup> If we were willing to accept this conclusion, we might also be willing to accept that a creature without language can have no concepts. Davidson's argument for his conclusion is that a creature can have a belief only if it has the concept of belief, and that a creature can have the concept of belief only if it has language. But neither of these premises is obviously true, or even particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Davidson 1975 and Davidson 1982.

plausible in itself; and Davidson's arguments for the premises are extremely brief and unclear.<sup>8</sup>

Davidson's position is partly motivated by the anti-realist sentiment discussed above. At one point, Davidson discusses a case in which observers describe a dog as believing that a cat went up an oak tree. He writes the following:

But how about the dog's supposed belief that the cat went up that oak tree? That oak tree, as it happens, is the oldest tree in sight. Does the dog think that the cat went up the oldest tree in sight? Or that the cat went up the same tree it went up the last time the dog chased it? It is hard to make sense of the questions. But then it does not seem possible to distinguish between quite different things the dog might be said to believe.<sup>9</sup>

The anti-realist sentiment is displayed most clearly in the sentence, "It is hard to make sense of the questions." The problem with this claim, at least to my mind, is that it seems easy to make sense of the questions. What is hard, perhaps, is answering them. But answering the first question actually does not seem so hard. Does the dog think that the cat went up the oldest tree in sight? No, of course not. The dog knows nothing of the relative ages of the trees in sight. That's just common sense. The second question is hard to answer, I admit, though we might be able to speculate reasonably about its answer if the case were more fully described. At any rate, one must accept some form of anti-realism if one wishes to infer, from our inability to answer questions, that the questions have no answers or are nonsensical. The final sentence of the quoted passage is hard to interpret, but it seems to be another expression of anti-realist thinking. Since we cannot determine which of several different beliefs the dog holds, the dog must hold no belief at all. Once again, I do not find this type of reasoning persuasive.

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<sup>8</sup> For a full critique of Davidson's arguments about beliefs without language, see Carruthers 1992, pp. 126 – 131. See also Tye 2000, pp. 177 – 178.

<sup>9</sup> Davidson 1982, p. 320. See also Davidson 1975, p. 16.

Davidson also displays the tendency, mentioned above, to over-intellectualize particular concepts in an effort to accuse his opponents of over-intellectualizing animals.

Concerning the same dog from before, he writes this:

... can the dog believe of an object that it is a tree? This would seem impossible unless we suppose the dog has many general beliefs about trees: that they are growing things, that they need soil and water, that they have leaves or needles, that they burn. There is no fixed list of things someone with the concept of a tree must believe, but without many general beliefs there would be no reason to identify a belief as a belief about a tree....<sup>10</sup>

Davidson's statement about the possession requirements for the concept TREE is contentious. Of course we adult humans have many general beliefs about trees, and it may be true to say that these beliefs are part of our concept of a tree. But having TREE may require no more than having seen trees and being able to recognize them when one sees them again. And this recognitional ability may amount to no more than a disposition to enter into a certain neural or functional state upon seeing trees. A large set of general beliefs may be necessary for having TREE, but it's not obviously necessary. Davidson's final claim, that many general beliefs about trees are necessary to make a particular belief count as a belief about a tree, is also contentious. A belief might count as a belief about a tree because it is realized by a neural or functional state that bears certain causal relations to trees. In sum, Davidson has not made a persuasive argument that the concept TREE is too intellectually sophisticated for a dog.

In general, any attempt to argue that thoughts, beliefs, and concepts require language will be an uphill battle, for at least two reasons. The first is that we often ascribe thoughts to higher animals. The philosopher who makes thought depend on language will be forced to deny the literal truth of these thought ascriptions—to hold that they are merely fictions useful

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<sup>10</sup> Davidson 1982, p. 320.

for predicting and explaining animal behavior. Admittedly, this position can be bolstered by calling attention to our occasional practice of ascribing thoughts and other mental states to inanimate objects. Davidson observes that someone might explain the movements of a heat-seeking missile by saying that it wants to destroy a certain airplane, and that it believes it can do so by moving in certain ways.<sup>11</sup> In this case, it is easy to see the ascriptions of a want and a belief to the missile as useful fictions. Higher animals are much closer to humans than inanimate objects are, however, so denying the literal truth of thought ascriptions to higher animals remains a somewhat unhappy position.

There is a second and more powerful reason to be skeptical of any argument for the dependence of thought on language. The conclusion of such an argument will always be contrary to our natural, commonsense conception of the relationship between thought and language. According to that conception, thought is primary, natural, and biological. Language is secondary, artificial, and conventional. Humans found themselves with thoughts and then, after some time, invented language as a tool for communicating those thoughts to each other. Humans didn't have to invent language, and if they hadn't, they would simply have gone on thinking without it. I am not saying that this natural, commonsense conception is unassailable, but I am saying that it is our natural, commonsense conception. A very persuasive argument would be needed to dislodge it, and I have never met such an argument.

Apart from the published arguments, there is perhaps one more motivation for holding that concepts require language. It is the correlation we often take to hold between which concepts a person has and which words the person has. Pretty much everyone with the concept ELECTRON has the word "electron" (or its translation in another language), and probably most people with the word have the concept. The correlation is manifested in our

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<sup>11</sup> Davidson 1982, p. 323.

educational practices. The best way to give someone a new concept is to teach the person a new word, together with the meaning of the word. Mastering an unfamiliar discipline is partly a matter of acquiring its defining concepts, and the latter is largely a matter of learning the discipline's defining vocabulary. I am sympathetic to this motivation for holding that concepts require language. I acknowledge the correlation between concepts and words, but I resist the urge to extrapolate it beyond language-using creatures (or, more precisely, beyond creatures with complete mastery of a language). We may divide creatures into those that use language and those that do not, and we may then say of the first group that it exhibits a concept-word correlation, while we remain silent about the second group. Consider an analogy. Some people keep meticulous financial records, and every time they make a purchase, they save the receipt for a year. Among such people, there is an excellent correlation between the purchases they have made in the past year, and the receipts they presently possess. Pretty much every such person who has bought, say, a hat in the past year has a receipt for it, and pretty much every such person with a receipt for a hat has bought one in the last year. However, many people do not bother with financial record keeping, and discard most receipts soon after receiving them. Among these people, there is no correlation between past purchases and presently possessed receipts. It would, obviously, be absurd to extrapolate the correlation observed in the first group to the second group, and to conclude that people in the second group have made few or no purchases in the past year. Likewise, I submit, we cannot extrapolate the concept-word correlation observed among language users to creatures without language and conclude that the latter have no concepts.

So far my discussion of the broad form of the animal-infant argument has limited its focus to the actual world. I have considered only the claim that there are some actual

creatures with experiences but no concepts. However, a proponent of the broad form of the animal-infant argument might grant the uncertainty of this claim while still insisting that creatures with experiences but no concepts are possible (more specifically, metaphysically possible). I don't see how one could argue for this claim of possibility. It is simply a modal intuition. I wish I knew of a general procedure for testing modal intuitions as true or false, or as rational or irrational to believe, but I do not. Hence all I can do is report that I lack the intuition, and make three observations that might weaken the intuition in those who have it.

The first observation concerns the analysis of knowledge. As everyone knows, some philosophers once held that knowledge is justified true belief. Edmund Gettier gave two counterexamples to that view in 1963, and many other philosophers followed suit with counterexamples of their own. Gettier's counterexamples showed that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. In other words, they showed that subjects with justified true belief (of a proposition) but no knowledge (of the proposition) are possible. Gettier described specific, detailed scenarios in which a subject clearly has justified true belief but no knowledge. He did not simply say, "Surely subjects with justified true belief but no knowledge are possible." If he had simply said that, he would only have begged the question against his opponents. The version of the animal-infant argument we're now considering simply says, "Surely creatures with experiences but no concepts are possible." This strikes me as begging the question against conceptualism in the way that Gettier did not beg the question against the justified-true-belief analysis of knowledge.

Let me be clear that I'm only reporting how the present version of the animal-infant argument strikes me. I acknowledge that it might not strike others as question-begging. I certainly don't believe that all claims of possibility have to be supported by specific, detailed



scenarios in order to avoid begging the question against the claims of necessity they falsify.

Take the claim that having kidneys is (metaphysically) necessary for having a heart. As far as I know, there are no counterexamples to this claim in the actual world. (I expect there probably are some, in the annals of medical or veterinary science, but let's ignore them.) I still reject the claim because, surely, creatures with hearts but no kidneys are possible.

Appealing to this claim of possibility does not beg the question against the claim of necessity it falsifies, even though I cannot describe a specific, detailed scenario to support the claim of possibility. (I could describe a specific, detailed scenario and simply stipulate that some creature in it has a heart and no kidneys, but that would clearly be a pointless exercise.) I wish I could say why Gettier had to describe a specific, detailed scenario to avoid begging the question against the justified-true-belief analysis, while I don't have to describe one to avoid begging the question against the necessity of kidneys for hearts. I wish I could, but I can't. I can only report that affirming the possibility of experiences without concepts, without describing a specific, detailed scenario, strikes me as begging the question against conceptualism.

The second observation concerns the philosophy of mind. Functionalism is presently the dominant philosophical theory of the mind. According to functionalism, each mental state is defined by the causal role it plays in the system of all mental states (together with environmental stimuli and behaviors). Hence, the identity of each mental state is bound up with its relations to other mental states, and in most instances these relations are dreadfully complex and, at the present time, poorly understood. Many functionalists, I am sure, believe that their view is (metaphysically) necessarily true. If we accept functionalism as necessarily true, then we should think twice before asserting that creatures with experiences but no

concepts are possible. For since experiences are a type of mental state, their identity is bound up with their relations to other mental states, and these relations are dreadfully complex and poorly understood. We cannot assume blithely that it's possible to remove concepts from the mind while leaving experiences present and intact. The identity of experiences might be bound up too much with their relations to concepts.

Of course, to say that we should think twice about something before doing it is not to say that we shouldn't do it. Moreover, I allow that we are sometimes justified in affirming the possibility of one mental state or faculty without another. It is possible for any one of the sense modalities to be removed while leaving the others, together with the faculty of conceptual thought, present and intact. Actual cases prove this fact of possibility, of course, but I think we might still affirm it even if there were no actual cases to prove it. I am even inclined to say that a creature could lose all of its sense modalities, and have no experiences at all, and still have conceptual thoughts. I am inclined to say it, but I am not entirely certain. And I am even less certain that a creature could have conceptual thoughts while having no experiences, experiential memories, or faculty of imagination. (Concept empiricists might deny this possibility.) The point I'm making is simply that it's possible for one mental state or faculty to be numerically distinct from another while still (metaphysically) depending on the other for its existence. Functionalism suggests that such a dependence might hold even though it's not obvious to us, at the present time, that it does hold. This suggestion should give pause to those who intuit the possibility of creatures with experiences but no concepts.

The third observation concerns types of possibility. The non-conceptualist I am currently debating intuit the metaphysical possibility of creatures with experiences but no concepts. But there is a danger of confusing epistemic possibility with metaphysical

possibility. Someone might intuit—or think that he or she intuit— that something is metaphysically possible when it is in fact only epistemically possible. This would be an easy mistake to make, since in ordinary thought and talk we do not explicitly distinguish different types of possibility. We normally say, “Such-and-such is possible,” not, “Such-and-such is epistemically possible,” or, “Such-and-such is metaphysically possible.” I am happy to grant that creatures with experiences but no concepts are epistemically possible, at least for most people. Most people are not conceptualists and have no beliefs that conflict with the existence of creatures with experiences but no concepts. However, epistemic possibility does not imply metaphysical possibility. Goldbach’s conjecture is a mathematical proposition that has been neither proved nor disproved. Hence, both its truth and its falsehood are epistemically possible. But it’s not the case that both its truth and its falsehood are metaphysically possible; one or the other must be metaphysically impossible. Creatures with experiences but no concepts might be epistemically possible and metaphysically impossible, and their epistemic possibility might mislead the non-conceptualist into intuiting their metaphysical possibility.

I do not mean to deny that we can ever trust our intuitions of metaphysical possibility. A creature with a heart but no liver is epistemically possible for me; the existence of such a creature conflicts with none of my beliefs. At the same time, I intuit that such a creature is metaphysically possible, and I accept this intuition. All I am presently saying is that there is the danger of confusing epistemic and metaphysical possibility, and that the non-conceptualist who intuit the metaphysical possibility of creatures with experiences but no concepts should be aware of the danger and use caution.

## 2. *The Narrow Animal-Infant Argument*

The narrow form of the animal-infant argument does not say that some animals or infants have experiences but lack concepts altogether. Instead, the narrow form of the argument says only that some animals or infants have experiences but lack concepts for some of the things their experiences represent. We actually should speak, not of *the* narrow form of the argument, but of a class of narrow forms. Each narrow form says, of some particular thing, that some animals or infants have experiences representing it but lack a concept for it. For instance, a non-conceptualist might insist that some creatures have experiences representing squareness without possessing the concept SQUARE.

I believe that my replies to the broad form of the animal-infant argument can be adapted to every narrow form that is likely to be made. Take once again the argument that a creature could have an experience representing squareness without possessing the concept SQUARE. It's not clear that lower animals (like caterpillars) and "intermediate" animals (like fish) both have experiences representing squareness and lack the concept SQUARE. While it's certain that higher animals and infants have experiences, it's not so clear that they both have experiences representing squareness and lack the concept SQUARE. If animals and infants do have the concept SQUARE, perhaps we *in principle* cannot know for certain that they do. But the anti-realist intuition connecting this fact about knowledge to the claim that animals and infants lack SQUARE is contentious; and we may be able to speculate reasonably that some animals and infants have SQUARE. The fact that animals and infants lack language, and the word "square," is no evidence against their possession of SQUARE. I lack the intuition that a creature with an experience representing squareness but without

SQUARE is (metaphysically) possible; and my earlier observations concerning the analysis of knowledge, functionalism, and types of possibility may weaken the intuition in others.

The non-conceptualist who makes a narrow form of the animal-infant argument might be tempted to exaggerate the intellectual sophistication of the concept involved, and to insist, without justification, that the intellectual requirements for its possession are quite demanding. For instance, the non-conceptualist who denies SQUARE to animals and infants might insist that one can have SQUARE only if one knows certain geometrical truths, *e.g.*, that squares have four sides and that squares are equilateral rectangles. While this claim about the possession requirements for SQUARE may be true, it's not obviously true. Having SQUARE may require no more than having seen squares and being able to recognize them when one sees them again. And this recognitional ability may amount to no more than a disposition to enter into a certain neural or functional state upon seeing squares.

To be clear, I allow that we are sometimes justified in denying particular concepts to animals and infants. Animals and infants do not have ELECTRON, I am sure. I cannot say precisely why my attitudes toward SQUARE and ELECTRON differ. ELECTRON, a concept of a subatomic particle, just seems to me obviously too intellectually sophisticated for animals and infants; the same is not true of SQUARE, a concept of a basic geometric shape. At this point, the non-conceptualist might claim that turnaround is fair play. If I am justified in denying ELECTRON to animals and infants, simply on the grounds that ELECTRON seems to me too intellectually sophisticated for them, then the non-conceptualist is justified in denying SQUARE to animals and infants, simply on the grounds that SQUARE seems to him too intellectually sophisticated for them. I have to agree, but I also have to remind the non-conceptualist of two important points. The first is that the non-

conceptualist's argument—a narrow form of the animal-infant argument—turns on the premise that some (actual or possible) animals or infants both have experiences representing squareness and lack the concept SQUARE. The second point is that the non-conceptualist is justified in asserting this premise, on the grounds that it seems true to him, only if it does seem true to him. In assessing whether or not the premise seems true, the non-conceptualist needs to consider the following type of case. We place a square object before the open eyes of an infant in normal viewing conditions. The infant looks at it but, being an infant, doesn't do much of anything. Does it really *seem* that the infant—whose visual system could be less developed than an adult's—both has an experience representing squareness and lacks the concept SQUARE? Or are the facts of the case simply unclear? The non-conceptualist can say that it's the former, but I think that he is more likely—if he is being honest—to say that it's the latter. And if he says that it's the latter, he may also admit that the truth value of his argument's premise is unclear.

I believe that narrow forms of the animal-infant argument are actually a greater threat to the conceptualist project—the project of developing and defending the conceptualist thesis—than the broad form is. The broad form's premise makes a claim that's too broad to command many philosophers' assent. Because the premise of a narrow form is more modest, more philosophers will find it acceptable. A conceptualist who attempts to develop the conceptualist thesis by suggesting that a particular concept is deployed in a particular type of experience will always invite the criticism that some (actual or possible) creatures have experiences of the type in question but lack the concept in question. Such criticisms are often facile, and when they are we may refer to them as “facile narrow appeals to conceptual impoverishment.” The conceptualist attempting to develop the conceptualist thesis must

remain constantly on guard against facile narrow appeals to conceptual impoverishment. I do not mean to suggest that all narrow appeals to conceptual impoverishment are facile. We cannot allow the conceptualist to affirm outright absurdities. A theory implying that animals and infants have ELECTRON is a false theory. There are no clear rules or principles to guide our debate. We must simply use common sense and our best judgment.

I wish to conclude this chapter by examining two published uses of the animal-infant argument by non-conceptualists. The first comes from Christopher Peacocke, and the second comes from Michael Tye.<sup>12</sup> By and large, both Peacocke and Tye rely on narrow forms of the argument.

Peacocke criticizes John McDowell's version of conceptualism. For the time being, all we need to say about McDowell's view is this: McDowell holds that properties, such as shapes, colors, and shades, are among the contents of our experiences; and he holds that our experiences capture those properties with demonstrative concepts, such as THIS SHAPE, THIS COLOR, and THIS SHADE. Peacocke notes that one can exercise the demonstrative concept THIS SHAPE only if one has the general concept SHAPE. He then writes, in criticism of McDowell, "It is ... quite implausible that one must have that general concept in order to perceive objects as having various specific shapes."<sup>13</sup> This is a facile narrow appeal to conceptual impoverishment. Peacocke never explains why the idea he describes as quite implausible is quite implausible. Presumably, Peacocke simply intuitively feels the (metaphysical) possibility of a creature who perceives objects as having specific shapes but lacks the concept SHAPE. I have already expressed skepticism about such an intuition.

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<sup>12</sup> Peacocke 2001a, and Tye 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Peacocke 2001a, p. 245.

Later, Peacocke criticizes conceptualism by suggesting that it implies what he calls the “hard line on animal perception.” He defines the hard line as “the thesis that none of the conscious perceptual states with representational content enjoyed by mature humans can be enjoyed by nonlinguistic animals without concepts, or with only minimal conceptual capacities.”<sup>14</sup> Essentially, the hard line states that non-linguistic animals have no experiences of the kind that adult humans have. Peacocke asserts that the hard line is unintuitive, and I agree. The problem with Peacocke’s criticism of conceptualism is that conceptualism does not imply the hard line. Notice the disjunction that concludes Peacocke’s definition of the hard line: “without concepts, or with only minimal conceptual capacities.” Peacocke seems to suppose that these disjuncts come to the same thing in the present context, but they do not. For the conceptualist, a creature with no concepts could have no experiences of the kind that adult humans have, while a creature with a few concepts (minimal conceptual capacities) could have some experiences of this kind. If animals have minimal conceptual capacities, as Peacocke allows, then the conceptualist is not committed to the hard line, and Peacocke’s criticism falls apart. It would do no good for Peacocke to revise his definition of the hard line by dropping the second disjunct of the concluding disjunction. This revision would yield the following definition of the hard line: “the thesis that none of the conscious perceptual states with representational content enjoyed by mature humans can be enjoyed by nonlinguistic animals without concepts.” Conceptualism does imply this thesis, but the conceptualist can insist that the thesis is not unintuitive. The conceptualist can insist that it is unclear which non-linguistic animals, if any, lack concepts altogether; and that any non-linguistic animals to which it is reasonable to deny concepts altogether—caterpillars, perhaps—are also non-

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<sup>14</sup> Peacocke 2001a, p. 260.



linguistic animals to which it is reasonable to deny experiences of the kind that adult humans have.<sup>15</sup>

Tye makes the general assumption, which I am willing to grant, that one has a concept only if one can think thoughts containing the concept. He then goes on to press several narrow forms of the animal-infant argument, at first focusing on experiences with evaluative contents. His first argument concerns foul smells, which he claims are a proper subclass of bad smells.<sup>16</sup> Here is what Tye writes:

Must one have the capacity to think a thought into which the concept *foul* enters in order for something to smell foul to one? Surely not. While it is certainly true that the perceptual concept *foul* is typically acquired by exposure to foul smells, intuitively it is not a necessary condition of those smells smelling foul to one that one already have the concept *foul*. In this connection, it is worth noting that new born babies react to Q-tips dipped in sulfur and held beneath their noses by grimacing and turning away. The obvious explanation for their doing so is that the sulfur smells foul to them. But that surely does not require that they already have the concept *foul*.<sup>17</sup>

Tye's focus on foul smells is carefully chosen for his purpose. In contemporary parlance, the word "foul," as applied to smells, has a certain air of erudition, especially as compared to more common words and phrases such as "bad," "very bad," and "awful." I would generally expect more intelligent, better educated people to describe foul smells as foul, and less intelligent, worse educated people to describe foul smells as bad, very bad, or awful. As a

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<sup>15</sup> Peacocke's discussion has a complication I have not mentioned. Peacocke does not simply state that the hard line is unintuitive. Rather, he observes that it has the following unintuitive consequence: that it cannot be literally true "that the animal has a visual experience as of a surface at a certain orientation, and at a certain distance and direction from itself, in exactly the same sense in which an adult human can have a visual experience with that as part of its content" (2001a, p. 260). It is unclear why Peacocke makes this observation, since the hard line is unintuitive in itself. Perhaps he is saying that an adult human experience can capture very precise, determinate properties—orientations, distances, and directions—and that conceptualism makes it a mystery how the experiences of an animal with only a few concepts could do the same. If this is Peacocke's point, though, the reference to animals is otiose. *Prima facie*, conceptualism makes it a mystery how adult human experiences could capture very precise, determinate properties, since adult humans typically do not have concepts for such properties. This criticism is the well-known fineness-of-grain argument, which the conceptualist is obliged to answer, but which is entirely distinct from the animal-infant argument.

<sup>16</sup> Tye 2005, p. 225.

<sup>17</sup> Tye 2005, p. 225.

proponent of the animal-infant argument, Tye seeks to accuse the conceptualist of over-intellectualizing animals and infants, and that's precisely what experiences of foul smells help him do. It's easy to see why Tye insists that smelling foul is not the same thing as smelling bad, but only one way of smelling bad. If smelling foul were the same thing as smelling bad, then Tye's claim that a baby's experience can represent something as foul would only amount to the claim that the baby's experience can represent something as bad, and attributing the concept BAD to a baby is not nearly so unpalatable as attributing FOUL to it.

Let us suppose that FOUL is distinct from BAD, VERY BAD, and AWFUL. FOUL still must be extremely similar to some or all of the latter three concepts. If two concepts are distinct but extremely similar, the similarity can make us prone to confuse the concepts and the properties they express. Hence, we might falsely say that something smells foul when in truth it smells very bad. Such a mistake would be minor and harmless, of course, but it would still be, strictly speaking, a mistake. Another minor mistake we might make is falsely saying that someone's experience represents a smell as foul when in truth the experience represents the smell as very bad. The point is this: If FOUL is distinct from BAD, VERY BAD, and AWFUL then we must be skeptical that any given foulness attribution is, strictly speaking, true (though we can typically be certain that it is at least very nearly true). And we must also be skeptical that any given claim that an experience represents a smell as foul is true. We must be skeptical, in particular, of Tye's claim that babies have experiences representing smells as foul. Indeed, we should have been skeptical of this claim all along. Tye asserts that the "obvious explanation" for the babies' behavior "is that the sulfur smells foul to them." But that is not the one and only obvious explanation. Equally obvious are the explanations

that the sulfur smells bad, that it smells very bad, and that it smells awful. There is no clear reason to prefer Tye's explanation to these latter three. In conclusion, Tye has not shown that the conceptualist must attribute FOUL to animals or infants.

Tye makes more arguments involving evaluative contents. Discussing small children to whom chocolate tastes good, he writes, "The taste is experienced as good by the child in that the child undergoes an overall experience which represents the presence of the taste in the mouth and represents it as good. Intuitively, this is not a cognitive response. It does not require its subject to possess evaluative concepts."<sup>18</sup> Discussing pain, Tye writes, "Pain experiences represent tissue damage and further represent such damage as bad for their subjects. But this surely does not require all those who experience pain to have the concept *bad* or *apt to harm*. Intuitively, we do not need to be able to think thoughts in order for pains to feel bad to us."<sup>19</sup> Here we have two facile narrow appeals to conceptual impoverishment. Tye simply intuits the (metaphysical) possibility of creatures who experience things as good and bad without having the concepts GOOD and BAD. I have already expressed skepticism about such intuitions.

One of Tye's arguments is neuro-physiological. He claims that experiences of fear represent feared objects as dangerous, and that the property of being dangerous is a value. One of the main brain structures subserving fear experiences is the amygdala, which "is very basic and ancient."<sup>20</sup> Tye notes that "removal of the amygdala in monkeys produces a total lack of ... fear."<sup>21</sup> He also writes, "The amygdala processes information via subcortical

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<sup>18</sup> Tye 2005, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup> Tye 2005, p. 227.

<sup>20</sup> Tye 2005, p. 226.

<sup>21</sup> Tye 2005, p. 226.

pathways that allow for faster transmission than is found in the cerebral hemispheres (within which thought and decision-making occur). It thus permits us ‘to begin to respond to dangerous stimuli before we fully know what the stimulus is.’”<sup>22</sup> Tye draws his conclusion in the following sentence: “If the basic experience of fear is traceable to the operation of the amygdala and the amygdala operates without conceptual activity, then it seems that the experience of fear can occur and with it the representation of the value of being dangerous without its subject possessing the concept *dangerous*.”<sup>23</sup>

Tye’s argument here is unpersuasive. He claims that “the amygdala operates without conceptual activity,” but he adduces no solid evidence for the claim. The amygdala may operate independently of the cerebral hemispheres, but this fact is irrelevant unless we suppose that all conceptual activity occurs in the hemispheres. Tye does state that “thought and decision-making occur” in the hemispheres, but this statement is open to interpretation. It could mean that all thought occurs in the hemispheres, or that most or much thought occurs there. Tye cites no evidence supporting the former, stronger claim, and I am skeptical that neuro-physiological evidence does support it (in part because of the vagueness of the term “thought”). If we grant that the amygdala operates without conceptual activity, we can still ask whether creatures with amygdalae but no cerebral hemispheres have fear experiences. The fact that monkeys with their amygdalae removed have no fear shows only that the amygdala is necessary for fear, not that it is sufficient. Perhaps fear experiences arise from the interaction of the amygdala with the cerebral hemispheres. This hypothesis is perfectly compatible with the supposition that the fast-operating amygdala begins to produce “fear behavior” (*e.g.*, jumping back) a very short time before the slow-operating hemispheres

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<sup>22</sup> Tye 2005, p. 226; embedded quotation from LeDoux 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Tye 2005, p. 226

register the presence of something to be feared. Our bodies may have evolved to get a “head start” on certain behaviors when time is of the essence, behaviors that quickly come under the control of conscious experience. Moreover, it is not necessarily implausible to deny fear experiences to a creature with no cerebral hemispheres whose amygdala produces fear behavior, such as fleeing. If the creature is sufficiently simple, we may even suspect it of complete automatism (recall the caterpillar).

In general, it is unclear why Tye chooses to focus on experiences with evaluative contents as opposed to other types of contents. My suspicion, however, is that he tacitly supposes evaluative concepts to be exceptionally intellectually sophisticated. Evaluative concepts are, after all, normative concepts, and understanding the nature of normativity has long been an intellectually daunting philosophical project. If one associates evaluative concepts with the intellectually sophisticated activity of philosophizing about normativity, then one might be inclined to see attributions of evaluative concepts to animals and infants as over-intellectualization. But one should not see such attributions as over-intellectualization. There is no reason to believe that one can have the concepts GOOD and BAD only if one knows something of philosophical theories of goodness and badness.

To conclude our discussion of Tye, let’s look at a criticism he levels against McDowell. Recall that, on McDowell’s view, experiences use the demonstrative concept THIS SHADE to capture shades. Responding to this view, Tye writes the following.

... McDowell’s proposal appeals to a demonstrative concept that uses a general sortal, *shade*. The latter is a recognitional concept. The idea that in order to undergo an experience of a particular shade of red, something a very small child can do, from a very early age, one must possess the concept *shade*, is absurd. To possess the concept *shade*, one must possess a cognitive grasp of the difference between a shade and a color that is not a shade, classifying red<sub>27</sub> as a shade, for example, and red as

not. It seems to me quite likely that some high schoolers do not grasp the concept *shade*!<sup>24</sup>

This passage is a good example of exaggerating the intellectual sophistication of a certain concept, and insisting, without justification, that the intellectual requirements for its possession are quite demanding. It is far from clear that having the concept SHADE requires one to have “a cognitive grasp of the difference between a shade and a color that is not a shade, classifying red<sub>27</sub> as a shade, for example, and red as not.” Actually, it is far from clear what this requirement means. It seems to mean something like this: Whenever one encounters red<sub>27</sub>, one forms the belief that it’s a shade, and whenever one encounters red, one forms the belief that it’s not a shade. (Of course, one encounters red if and only if one encounters some particular shade of red, so one will always be forming these shade beliefs in pairs, one positive and one negative.) I see no reason to accept that there is such a requirement on possession of SHADE. Having SHADE may require no more than having seen shades, and being able to recognize them when one sees them again. And this recognitional ability may amount to no more than a disposition to enter into a certain neural or functional state upon seeing shades. Even if having SHADE does require believing that shades one encounters are shades, there is no reason to think that it also requires believing that non-shades one encounters are not shades. The very small child with SHADE need never think about whether red is a shade. And even if having SHADE does require believing that non-shades one encounters are not shades, it is not obvious that very small children lack such beliefs. What is so intellectually sophisticated about the belief that red is not a shade? In assessing Tye’s argument, we should also consider the possibility of a person who sincerely says that red is a shade, or that every color is a shade. Tye’s statement about the possession

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<sup>24</sup> Tye 2005, p. 231.

conditions for SHADE suggests that such an individual would lack the concept. But that verdict is not clearly correct. Perhaps the person does have SHADE and is simply mistaken in some of her applications of it. Having a concept does not require that one never make mistakes using it. In sum, Tye's argument that the concept SHADE is too intellectually sophisticated for a very small child is unpersuasive.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FINENESS-OF-GRAIN ARGUMENT

This chapter examines and criticizes the fineness-of-grain argument for non-conceptualism. For the sake of brevity, I refer to this argument as the “f-o-g” argument. In its most common form, the f-o-g argument points to our ability to make very fine-grained perceptual discriminations, *e.g.*, our ability to discriminate, visually, between very similar shades of red. The argument is that we can, and do, perceptually discriminate far more properties than we possess concepts for, so our experiences can, and do, represent far more properties than we possess concepts for.<sup>1</sup>

We can get a better handle on what the f-o-g argument is supposed to be by looking at expressions of it from three different non-conceptualists—Gareth Evans, Christopher Peacocke, and Richard Heck. Evans suggests that conceptualism implies that our concepts are “endlessly fine-grained.”<sup>2</sup> Evans asks rhetorically “Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many color concepts as there are shades of color that we can sensibly discriminate?”<sup>3</sup> Christopher Peacocke expresses the f-o-g argument as follows:

... an experience can have a finer-grained content than can be formulated by using concepts possessed by the experiencer. If you are looking at a range of mountains, it may be correct to say that you see some as rounded, some as jagged. But the content of your visual experience in respect of the shape of the mountains is far more specific than that description indicates. The description involving the concepts *round* and

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<sup>1</sup> The f-o-g argument derives from Evans 1982, p. 229; and McDowell, 1994, Lecture III, §5. For recent discussion, see Chuard 2006; Hanna 2008, pp. 46 – 50; Pelling 2007; Roskies 2010, §§2.1, 2.4; and Tye 2009, pp. 105 - 108.

<sup>2</sup> Evans 1982, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Evans 1982, p. 229.



*jagged* would cover many different fine-grained contents that your experience could have, contents that are discriminably different from one another.<sup>4</sup>

The final expression of the f-o-g argument that I wish to consider comes from Richard Heck, who writes the following:

Consider your current perceptual state—and now imagine what a complete description of the way the world appears to you at this moment might be like. Surely a thousand words would hardly begin to do the job. And it is not just that the description would be long: Rather, it seems hard to imagine that your perceptual state, as it is now, has any specific articulation corresponding to the conceptual articulation of a particular one of the many different Thoughts that might capture its content; and it seems at least as hard to imagine that you now possess all the concepts that would be expressed by the words occurring in such a description, even if one could be framed. Before me now, for example, are arranged various objects with various shapes and colors, of which, it might seem, I have no concept. My desk exhibits a whole host of shades of brown, for which I have no names. The speakers to the sides of my computer are not quite flat, but have curved faces; I could not begin to describe their shape in anything like adequate terms. The leaves on the trees outside my window are fluttering back and forth, randomly, as it seems to me, as the wind passes over them.—Yet my experience of these things represents them far more precisely than that, far more distinctively, it would seem, than any characterization I could hope to formulate, for myself or for others, in terms of the concepts I presently possess. The problem is not lack of time, but lack of descriptive resources, that is, lack of the appropriate concepts.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that these three quotes from these three non-conceptualists make it sufficiently clear what the f-o-g argument is supposed to be.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I lay out some assumptions about the nature of experiential contents that guide my subsequent discussion. In the second section I consider and criticize what is currently the most prominent conceptualist reply to the f-o-g argument, the “demonstrative-concepts reply.” In the third and fourth sections, I distinguish two different forms the f-o-g argument can take, and I reply to each form.

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<sup>4</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 67 – 68.

<sup>5</sup> Heck 2000, pp. 489 – 490.

### *1. Assumptions about the Nature of Experiential Contents*

I begin my discussion of the f-o-g argument by making some assumptions about the nature of experiential contents. All of the assumptions seem reasonable to me, but I acknowledge that my set of assumptions is no more reasonable than some other sets that are inconsistent with mine. I believe that I am justified in making the assumptions I make because my only aim in this chapter is to criticize the f-o-g argument. If I can effectively criticize the f-o-g argument by invoking only reasonable assumptions, then the effectiveness of this criticism will show, at the very least, that the argument begs the question against these assumptions. And an argument that begs the question against reasonable assumptions is a bad argument.

Here, then, are the assumptions I make about the nature of experiential contents: First, I assume that experiential contents are propositions. Second, I assume that these propositions are existential propositions. I take an existential proposition to be one that is most perspicuously expressed in formal logic by a sentence beginning with an existential quantifier whose scope encompasses the rest of the sentence. An example of such a sentence is this:

$$(1) \quad \exists x F(x)$$

The intuitive rationale behind this assumption is that our experiences tell us that there exist objects satisfying certain descriptions. When you see a red object, for example, your visual experience tells you that there exists a red object. My third assumption is that the existential propositions in experiential contents are, at least sometimes, *singular* existential propositions. A singular existential proposition is one that is most perspicuously expressed in formal logic by a sentence beginning with an existential quantifier whose scope encompasses the rest of the sentence and contains at least one constant term denoting a concrete individual. If we

stipulate that the Greek letter “ $\alpha$ ” is a constant term denoting a concrete individual, then an example of such a sentence is this:

$$(2) \quad \exists x R(x, \alpha)$$

The main intuitive rationale behind this assumption is that some of our experiences tell us that there exist objects with egocentric directions and distances, and egocentric directions and distances are best understood as relations to a concrete individual, namely, the subject of the experience. For example, when you see an object ahead and to the right, five feet away, your visual experience tells you that there exists an object ahead of you and to your right, and five feet away from you.

Let me try to clarify these assumptions by applying them to a more elaborate example and using some more suggestive notation. Suppose you see a red round object, ahead and to the right, five feet away. Let the Greek letter “ $\sigma$ ” be a constant term denoting you, the subject of the experience. My assumptions say that we can most perspicuously depict your visual experience’s content with something like the following formal logical sentence:

$$(3) \quad \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}(x) \ \& \ \text{AheadRight}(x, \sigma) \ \& \ \text{FiveFeet}(x, \sigma)]$$

The suggestion that (3) accurately depicts the content in question might meet with two immediate objections. First, someone might insist that (3) is incomplete. The experience will represent more than just the object’s color, shape, and egocentric direction and distance. The experience will also represent the object’s size and texture, as well as the properties of other objects in the subject’s visual field. My reply to this objection is that I intend (3) as no more than a partial, abstracted depiction of the content. All that (3) purports to depict are those aspects of the content that interest us in the present discussion, which are the red round object’s color, shape, and egocentric direction and distance. No doubt the experience will

actually represent more, and (3) could be expanded to depict additional aspects of the content; but (3) as it stands abstracts away from these additional aspects. The second objection is really a class of different objections picking on the different predicates used in (3). Someone might say that the predicate “Red” is too general to belong in an accurate depiction of an experiential content. It should be replaced with a predicate expressing some specific shade of red. Also, someone might say that the predicate “AheadRight” should be replaced with a more complex predicate expressing a relation among an object, a subject, and a pair of angular coordinates specifying a precise egocentric direction. Likewise, someone might insist that the predicate “FiveFeet” be replaced with a more complex predicate expressing a relation among an object, a subject, and the distance of five feet, with the distance understood as a concrete individual rather than an abstract relation. My reply to all of these objections is that I intend (3) only as a useful first approximation of a perfectly accurate depiction of the content in question. It is hard to say with any certainty what a perfectly accurate depiction would be, but (3) is fairly accurate, and it is also fairly succinct and fairly perspicuous. Thus, (3) does a good job of illustrating my assumptions about the nature of experiential contents.

## *2. The Demonstrative-Concepts Reply*

The “demonstrative-concepts reply” is usually considered to be the standard conceptualist reply to the f-o-g argument. The reply comes from John McDowell. McDowell holds that our experiential contents are as fine-grained as Evans, Peacocke, and Heck say they are; but he also holds that, contrary to what these three authors say, our concepts are sufficiently fine-grained to capture the contents. According to McDowell, we possess *demonstrative* concepts, such as THAT SHADE and THAT SHAPE, that can capture our fine-grained experiential

contents.<sup>6</sup> The literature on the demonstrative-concepts reply is enormous, and I cannot even beginning to discuss it adequately.<sup>7</sup> What I intend to do now is to identify what I believe to be the most powerful objection to the reply. I consider various ways the reply's proponent might defend the reply, and I try to show that none of these defenses is very promising. I conclude that the conceptualist should eschew the demonstrative-concepts reply and look for a different reply to the f-o-g argument.

In my opinion, the most powerful objection to the demonstrative-concepts reply comes from Heck, who appeals to cases of misperception. Suppose that you see a red tomato and misperceive it as green. Your experience's content contains greenness and not redness. However, if your experience uses a demonstrative concept like *THAT COLOR*, the concept must pick out the tomato's actual color, redness, and so the experience's content must contain redness and not greenness. The position espoused in the demonstrative-concepts reply delivers the wrong verdict on cases of misperception. Now suppose that the reply's proponent were to insist that the demonstrative color concepts deployed in visual experiences pick out, not the actual colors of the seen objects, but rather their apparent colors. If this position were tenable, the proponent could easily account for cases of misperception. In the case of our misperceived tomato, the proponent could say, *THAT COLOR* picks out the tomato's apparent color, greenness, and so the experience's content contains greenness and not redness. Unfortunately, this position is not tenable. For the tomato's apparent color is just

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<sup>6</sup> McDowell 1994, Lecture III, §5.

<sup>7</sup> For recent discussion, see Chuard 2006; Hanna 2008, pp. 46 – 50; Pelling 2007; Roskies 2010; and Tye 2009, pp. 106 – 108.

the color in the experience's content. The position we are considering appeals to the tomato's apparent color to account for the tomato's apparent color, and so the position is circular.<sup>8</sup>

Heck frames his criticism of the demonstrative-concepts reply as a criticism of McDowell. Heck observes that McDowell's broader philosophical views provide McDowell with resources for answering the criticism. McDowell is a disjunctivist: he believes that veridical and non-veridical experiences are fundamentally different kinds of things, and that there is no reason to expect a unified philosophical account of both. Accordingly, he can insist that the demonstrative-concepts reply works perfectly well for veridical experiences, and that its failure to generalize to non-veridical experiences is no criticism.<sup>9</sup> Heck writes that disjunctivism "seems incredible to [him]."<sup>10</sup> This is a sentiment that I share, and that I believe that most philosophers of perception share. For this reason, I find the imagined McDowellian defense of the demonstrative-concepts reply unsatisfactory.

Heck actually attempts to argue against disjunctivism, but his argument seems bad to me. Here is the argument:

... a disjunctive account of *what fixes representational content* is plainly a nonstarter. Compare the case of belief: Suppose we were to offer a disjunctive account of the contents of beliefs, one that might say, for example, that some belief of mine, if true, had the content that snow is white, if false, that snow is pink. Such a belief has no definite content at all, and such a theory about how the contents of beliefs are fixed is viciously circular. We cannot say what content my "belief" has unless we know whether it is true or false—but we cannot answer the question whether it is true, because we do not know what its content is—because we do not know whether it is true—etc., etc.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Heck 2000, pp. 494 – 496.

<sup>9</sup> Heck 2000, pp. 496 – 497.

<sup>10</sup> Heck 2000, p. 497.

<sup>11</sup> Heck 2000, pp. 497 – 498.

I do not feel the force of this reasoning. The disjunctivist about belief contents would presumably hold that beliefs fall into two kinds: one all of whose members are true and, perhaps, have their contents fixed in a certain way; and another all of whose members are false and, perhaps, have their contents fixed in a different way. It is not clear how adopting such a position would ever lead us to fixate on a single belief and to proclaim that it has one content if true, another if false. And it is not clear how such a position implies that beliefs have no definite contents at all. Perhaps we could find ourselves ignorant of both the content and truth value of a particular belief, and unable to learn either without learning both. But again, this possibility seems irrelevant to the existence of a definite content. Heck's argument against disjunctivism about belief contents is bad, and so the parallel argument against disjunctivism about experiential contents is also bad, for the same reasons.

As we have seen, Heck's criticism of the demonstrative-concepts reply appeals to cases of misperception. Bill Brewer attempts to defend the reply without appealing to disjunctivism. Brewer's defense draws on Gareth Evans' theory of demonstrative reference, according to which demonstrative reference depends on the speaker's or subject's ability to keep track of the referent over time. Brewer suggests that it is possible for a subject to attempt to make demonstrative reference to an object, but to fail due to a failure to satisfy this tracking requirement. Cases of misperception are just cases in which a subject deploys a demonstrative concept in an experience in a failed attempt to make demonstrative reference.<sup>12</sup> To see the problem with this defense of the demonstrative-concepts reply, return to the case in which the subject misperceives a red tomato as green. Brewer seems to be suggesting that the misperception consists in the fact that the subject attempts, but fails, to refer to the tomato's red color by deploying THAT COLOR. But the misperception cannot

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<sup>12</sup> Brewer 2005, pp. 222 – 223.

consist solely in this failed attempt at demonstrative reference. For, in addition to excluding redness, the experience's content also includes greenness. Brewer seems to have no resources for explaining the inclusion of this property in the content.<sup>13</sup>

Another philosopher who attempts to defend the demonstrative-concepts reply from Heck's criticism is Charlie Pelling. The main thrust of Pelling's defense seems to be that the non-conceptualist can explain cases of misperception no better than the proponent of the demonstrative-concepts reply. Return once again to the red tomato misperceived as green. The visual experience's content contains greenness and not redness. The proponent of the demonstrative-concepts reply must say that the experience deploys *THAT COLOR*, and that this concept picks out greenness and not redness. The proponent's problem is that it is hard to explain why the concept picks out greenness and not redness, especially given that the tomato is actually red and not green. Now Pelling claims that it is equally hard for the non-conceptualist to explain why the experience's content contains greenness and not redness. The non-conceptualist can assert that the experience has "some non-conceptual property P" that picks out greenness and not redness, but the non-conceptualist cannot explain why the experience has P rather than some other non-conceptual property, P\*, that picks out redness and not greenness.<sup>14</sup> The proponent of the demonstrative-concepts reply and the non-conceptualist are in the same boat when it comes to explaining cases of misperception.<sup>15</sup>

This argument is unpersuasive. The non-conceptualist can legitimately insist that there is an explanation of why the experience has P rather than P\*, though he or she—with his or her limited knowledge of the details of the case—may not be in a position to give the

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<sup>13</sup> Charlie Pelling (2007, §4) offers essentially the same criticism.

<sup>14</sup> Pelling 2007, p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Pelling 2007, pp. 175 – 176.



explanation. P and P\* are presumably neuro-physiological or functional properties of experiences (which are presumably neuro-physiological or functional states of the subject), and there is some physical explanation of why P is instantiated rather than P\*. By contrast, it does not seem that there can be a physical explanation of why THAT COLOR picks out greenness and not redness.

At this point, Pelling might try to defend the demonstrative-concepts reply by more or less aping the non-conceptualist's position on cases of misperception. He might say that, when the subject misperceives the red tomato as green, the neuro-physiological or functional property P is instantiated rather than the neuro-physiological or functional property P\*. The non-conceptualist presumably holds that P represents greenness in virtue of some physical relation, such as a complicated causal relation, that P bears to greenness and not to redness. Call this relation "R." Pelling might affirm that P bears R to greenness, but deny that bearing R to greenness suffices for representation of greenness. He might then affirm that the subject deploys THAT COLOR in the experience, and that this concept picks out greenness and not redness because the subject's experience has P (which bears R to greenness and not to redness) and not P\* (which bears R to redness and not to greenness). The idea here is that Pelling takes the non-conceptualist's explanation of why the experience represents greenness and not redness, and he appropriates it as an explanation of why THAT COLOR picks out greenness and not redness.<sup>16</sup>

The problem with this move is that it seems to make demonstrative concepts demonstrative in name only. The essence of demonstrative reference seems to lie in its

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<sup>16</sup> Pelling seems to approach this idea when he writes "... there seems no good reason ... to think that the illusoriness of an experience should prevent the conceptualist from claiming that the reference fixer for a demonstrative colour concept drawn into operation by such an experience is the particular set of teleological (or causal, or inferential-role) properties that the concept has" (2007, p. 177).

dependence on the “presence” of the referent. Admittedly, it is very hard to say what “presence” amounts to. It cannot amount to mere physical proximity. A perceptual demonstrative word or thought can refer to an object seen from indefinitely far away. There are also cases of anaphoric demonstrative reference. “I have a screwdriver,” someone might say, referring to a screwdriver far away. “That won’t help,” someone else might reply, referring to the same screwdriver. Despite the difficulty of framing a general definition of presence, it seems to be quite a stretch to say that greenness is present in the case of the red tomato misperceived as green. Admittedly, greenness may be present in virtue of the fact that it belongs to the experiential content. But this is not a fact that Pelling can appeal to without circularity. Let’s coin the term “pre-representational presence” to refer to the type of presence that is not in virtue of belonging to a representational content. Pre-representational presence is the only kind of presence Pelling can appeal to without circularity, and it seems to be a stretch to say that greenness is pre-representationally present in the case of the red tomato misperceived as green. The facts that the experience has P, and that P bears R to greenness, do not seem to suffice for the pre-representational presence of greenness. If they did, it seems that virtually all representations would count as demonstrative. Take the word “green.” It presumably represents greenness in virtue of bearing some physical relation, such as a complicated causal relation, to greenness. Call the relation “R\*.” If the instantiations of P and R sufficed for the pre-representational presence of greenness, then the utterance of “green” and the instantiation of R\* would seem to suffice for the pre-representational presence of greenness as well. What grounds could there be for treating P and R differently from “green” and R\*? As a consequence, representation of greenness by “green” would depend on the pre-representational presence of greenness, and “green” would be

demonstrative. But “green” is not demonstrative. (Anyone who believes that it is can apply the reasoning just put forth to a word that he or she believes to be non-demonstrative.)

My own reply to the f-o-g argument takes quite a different tack from the demonstrative-concepts reply. I suggest that our concepts are as coarse-grained as Evans, Peacocke, and Heck say they are; but I also suggest that, contrary to what these three authors say, our experiential contents are sufficiently coarse-grained to be captured by the concepts. The first step in developing my reply is to distinguish between two different forms the f-o-g argument can take: the “discriminative” form and the “introspective” form. My reply is actually two replies, one to each form of the argument. The next section focuses on the discriminative form, and the final section focuses on the introspective form.

### *3. The Discriminative Fineness-of-Grain Argument*

The discriminative form of the f-o-g argument appears explicitly in the quotes from Evans and Peacocke above. This form of the argument points to our ability to make very fine-grained perceptual discriminations, *e.g.*, our ability to discriminate, visually, between very similar shades of red. The argument is that we can, and do, perceptually discriminate far more properties than we possess concepts for; so our experiences can, and do, represent far more properties than we possess concepts for.

I call my reply to the discriminative f-o-g argument the “relational-concepts reply.” This reply has three different versions: an unsophisticated one and two sophisticated ones. The unsophisticated version is simple and easy to grasp, but, as we will see, it faces a problem that can be solved only by exchanging it for one or the other of the sophisticated versions.

According to the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply, when we visually discriminate between two very similar shades of red, we deploy in our visual experience the dyadic relational concept DIFFERENTLY SHADED. We deploy no monadic concept picking out either shade individually.<sup>17</sup>

We can illustrate the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply, and contrast it with non-conceptualism and the demonstrative-concepts reply, by invoking the assumptions we made earlier about the nature of experiential contents. These assumptions state that experiential contents are existential propositions and, at least sometimes, singular existential propositions. Let me introduce the notation “VE: P” as a way to depict a visual experience with P as its content. For example, we can depict the visual experience whose content is depicted by (3) as follows:

$$(4) \quad \text{VE: } \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}(x) \ \& \ \text{AheadRight}(x, \sigma) \ \& \ \text{FiveFeet}(x, \sigma)]$$

The only difference between (3) and (4) is that (3) depicts only the experience’s content, while (4) depicts the experience together with the content.

According to the non-conceptualist, when you visually discriminate between two very similar shades of red, your visual experience is most perspicuously depicted as follows:

$$(5) \quad \text{VE: } \exists x \ \exists y [\text{Shade}_1(x) \ \& \ \text{Shade}_2(y)]$$

For the sake of simplicity, (5) abstracts away from the shapes, egocentric directions and distances, and other properties and relations the experience will no doubt represent. A fuller version of (5) would depict these properties and relations; and the depiction of the egocentric directions and distances would contain the constant term “ $\sigma$ ” that denotes you, the subject of

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<sup>17</sup> The relational-concepts reply receives almost no mention in the literature. A form of it is discussed in Kelly 2001, pp. 414 – 416; and Brewer 2005, p. 226. But these authors conceive of the relational-concepts reply as a special form of the demonstrative-concepts reply; the relational concepts they discuss contain demonstrative elements.

the experience. What's important about (5) are the predicates "Shade<sub>1</sub>" and "Shade<sub>2</sub>," which express the two shades of red and do not correspond to any concepts you possess. By contrast with the non-conceptualist, the proponent of the demonstrative-concepts reply holds that the experience is most perspicuously depicted as follows:

$$(6) \quad \text{VE: } \exists x \exists y [\text{ThatShade}(x) \ \& \ \text{ThatShade}(y)]$$

Here the two tokens of the demonstrative predicate "ThatShade" pick out the two shades of red, and they correspond to two uses of the demonstrative concept THAT SHADE. By contrast with both the non-conceptualist and the proponent of the demonstrative-concepts reply, the proponent of the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply holds that the experience is most perspicuously depicted as follows:

$$(7) \quad \text{VE: } \exists x \exists y [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{Red}(y) \ \& \ \text{DifferentlyShaded}(x,y)]$$

The unsophisticated relational-concepts reply faces a problem, a problem that will require us to abandon the reply in favor of a more sophisticated version. I call this problem the "problem of trans-modal discrimination." When I say "trans-modal," I am not referring to the different sensory modalities of vision, audition, taction, and so forth. Rather, I am referring to the different modalities of visual experience, visual memory, and visual imagination. Trans-modal discrimination is a familiar phenomenon. You can see a shade of red and discriminate it from a very similar shade of red you saw yesterday and now only remember. And you can see a shade of red and imagine a shade of red that is very similar but different.

To see why trans-modal discrimination poses a problem for the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply, let's extend our notation for depicting visual experiences and their contents. We can write "VM: P" to depict a visual memory with P as its content, and "VI: P"

to depict a visual image with P as its content. Suppose that you see a shade of red and discriminate it from a very similar shade of red you saw yesterday and now only remember. Let's try to construct a depiction of your overall mental state, containing both the experience and the memory. It is natural to begin as follows:

$$(8) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [(Red(x) \dots \\ \text{VM: } \exists x [(Red(x) \dots \end{array}$$

We face an immediate problem. We need to include the predicate "DifferentlyShaded" in our depiction, but where does it go? In the experience's content, the memory's content, or both? For the sake of discussion, let's assume that the predicate goes in the experience's content and not in the memory's content. Now our overall depiction looks like this:

$$(9) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [(Red(x) \& DifferentlyShaded(x, \dots \\ \text{VM: } \exists x [(Red(x)] \end{array}$$

How do we complete the experience's content? We would like to use the variable from the memory's content and keep it bound by the quantifier in that content, but we cannot do so. It is no help to go back and revise our assumption that the predicate "DifferentlyShaded" goes in the experience's content and not in the memory's content. Revising this assumption simply puts us into one or the other of the following two situations:

$$(10) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [Red(x)] \\ \text{VM: } \exists x [Red(x) \& DifferentlyShaded(x, \dots \end{array}$$

$$(11) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [Red(x) \& DifferentlyShaded(x, \dots \\ \text{VM: } \exists x [Red(x) \& DifferentlyShaded(x, \dots \end{array}$$

Both of these situations are as problematic as the one into which our original assumption led us. Plainly, experiential-imaginative discrimination creates the same problem as experiential-memorial discrimination. This problem is the problem of trans-modal discrimination. I am going to develop two different solutions to this problem: the "demonstrative solution" and

the “broad-visual-state solution.” Each of these solutions involves exchanging the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply for a more sophisticated version.

The demonstrative solution introduces a new constant term into our notation, “ $\theta$ .” This is a “demonstrative constant”—it’s meant to correspond to the demonstrative words “this” and “that” and to the demonstrative concepts THIS and THAT. We can use this new constant to complete our depiction of the experiential-memorial discrimination as follows:

$$(12) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{DifferentlyShaded}(x, \theta)] \\ \text{VM: } \exists x [\text{Red}(x)] \end{array}$$

The idea here is that “ $\theta$ ” is a memorial demonstrative denoting the remembered red object, and that “ $\theta$ ” corresponds to a use of the one of the demonstrative concepts THIS or THAT. It is important to distinguish the demonstrative solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination from the demonstrative-concepts reply to the f-o-g argument. In the demonstrative solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination, the visual experience deploys a memorial demonstrative concept to denote a concrete individual; in the demonstrative-concepts reply to the f-o-g argument, the visual experience deploys an experiential demonstrative concept to denote an abstract property.

A serious worry facing the demonstrative solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination is the possibility of an experiential-memorial discrimination in which the memory is hallucinatory. Suppose that your overall mental state is the one depicted in (12). Suppose once again that “ $\theta$ ” is a memorial demonstrative purporting to denote the remembered red object. Now suppose that the visual memory is hallucinatory and that there is no remembered red object. In this case “ $\theta$ ” does not refer, and the experience would seem to have no content, or at least to have an incomplete content. The proponent of the demonstrative solution can surmount this difficulty. Imagine a fictional story beginning with

the existential sentence “There was an elephant in Buckingham Palace.” Assuming that there has never been an elephant in Buckingham Palace, this sentence is false. Now imagine that the story’s second sentence is a simple subject-predicate sentence beginning with a demonstrative purporting to denote the elephant, *e.g.*, “This was breaking things with its trunk.” It’s an awkward second sentence, but a meaningful one nonetheless. It has a content, and arguably a “complete” content. Yet its demonstrative does not refer. The defender of the demonstrative solution can reasonably affirm an analogy between the visual experience depicted in (12) and the second sentence of the fictional story.

Putting aside the worry about hallucinatory memories, it still must be admitted that (12) is a somewhat inaccurate depiction of the experiential-memorial discrimination. According to (12), the experience says, essentially, that the seen object is differently shaded from the remembered object. But, intuitively, what the experience says is that the shading the seen object has is different from the shading the remembered object had at the time it was seen. The experience can be veridical even though the remembered object has subsequently changed its shading and become the same shade as the seen object.

In order to correct (12), we need to do two things. First, we need to replace the simple predicate “DifferentlyShaded” with a more complex expression revealing the structure within the meaning of the English predicate “differently shaded.” The following equivalence is plausible:

$$(13) \quad \text{DifferentlyShaded}(x,y) \leftrightarrow \exists F \exists G [\text{Shade}(F) \ \& \ \text{Shade}(G) \ \& \ F \neq G \ \& \ F(x) \ \& \ G(y)]$$

Here we are using the notation of second-order predicate logic to quantify over abstract, first-order properties, to predicate second-order properties of the first-order properties, and to predicate the first-order properties of concrete individuals.



The second thing we need to do to correct (12) is to introduce into our logical notation a means of representing time and tense. There is more than one way to do this, but I will describe just one way that I believe to be attractive to many philosophers. This way involves denoting and quantifying over times, affirming relations among times, and relativizing predications to times. To illustrate, suppose that we wish to express the statement “There existed a red round object one day ago” in our formal logical notation. If we use the Greek letter “v” as a constant term to denote the present time, we might write something like this:

$$(14) \quad \exists x \exists t [\text{Time}(t) \ \& \ \text{Before}(t,v) \ \& \ \text{OneDay}(t,v) \ \& \ \text{Red}_t(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}_t(x)]$$

Here the predicate “Time” is used to indicate that  $t$  is a time, “Before” is used to indicate  $t$ ’s temporal direction from the present time, and “OneDay” is used to indicate  $t$ ’s temporal distance from the present time. The expressions “ $\text{Red}_t(x)$ ” and “ $\text{Round}_t(x)$ ” are to be read as “ $x$  is red at  $t$ ” and “ $x$  is round at  $t$ ,” respectively.

We are now in a position to correct (12) by putting forth a more accurate depiction of the experiential-memorial discrimination. Let the Greek letter “ $\tau$ ” be a constant term denoting the time of the experience. We can use this term to depict the experiential-memorial discrimination as follows:

$$(15) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [\text{Red}_\tau(x) \ \& \ \exists F \exists G (\text{Shade}(F) \ \& \ \text{Shade}(G) \ \& \ F \neq G \ \& \ F_\tau(x) \ \& \ G_\theta(\theta))] \\ \text{VM: } \exists x \exists t [\text{Time}(t) \ \& \ \text{Before}(t,\tau) \ \& \ \text{Red}_t(x)] \end{array}$$

Here the content of the visual memory is depicted as a past-tense content, which seems plausible independently. What are remembered are both an object seen in the past, and a time at which the object was seen. Again, this idea seems plausible in itself. The experience says that the seen object is red at the time of the experience, that the seen object has a certain shade at the time of the experience, and that the remembered object had a different shade at

the remembered time. Our demonstrative constant “ $\theta$ ” here does double duty. The first token, which occurs as a subscript attached to the predicate “G,” might be taken to correspond to the temporal demonstrative word “then,” and to a use of the temporal demonstrative concept THEN. This token of “ $\theta$ ” is a memorial demonstrative denoting the remembered time. The second token of “ $\theta$ ” is a memorial demonstrative denoting the remembered object.

Our development of the demonstrative solution in connection with experiential-imaginative discriminations can parallel the development in connection with experiential-memorial discriminations. Suppose that you see a shade of red and imagine a shade of red that is very similar but different. We might depict your overall mental state as follows:

$$(16) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{DifferentlyShaded}(x, \theta)] \\ \text{VI: } \exists x [\text{Red}(x)] \end{array}$$

Here “ $\theta$ ” is an imaginative demonstrative purporting to denote the imagined object. Of course, if the imagined object is imaginary, we must affirm an analogy between this demonstrative and the demonstrative in the fictional story about the elephant in Buckingham palace.

An imagined object need not be imaginary. It is possible to imagine a particular, actual red object as a different shade of red, and to discriminate the imagined shade from the shade of a red object one sees. In this case (16) will be an inaccurate depiction of the experiential-imaginative discrimination. According to (16), the experience says, essentially, that the seen object is differently shaded from the imagined object. But, intuitively, what the experience says is that the shading the seen object has is different from the shading the imagined object is imagined as having. The experience can be veridical even though the imagined object is actually the same shade as the seen object. We can correct (16) in a way that parallels our earlier correction of (12), the depiction of the experiential-memorial

discrimination. The first step is to make the assumption that mental images have contents saying that things are possible. The next step is to introduce into our notation a means of representing possibility. Paralleling our earlier means of representing time and tense, we will denote and quantify over possible worlds and relativize predications to possible worlds. To illustrate, suppose that we wish to express the statement “There could exist a red round object” in our formal logical notation. We might write something like this:

$$(17) \quad \exists x \exists p [\text{PossibleWorld}(p) \ \& \ \text{Red}_p(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}_p(x)]$$

Here the predicate “PossibleWorld” is used to indicate that  $p$  is a possible world. The expressions “ $\text{Red}_p(x)$ ” and “ $\text{Round}_p(x)$ ” are to be read as “ $x$  is red in  $p$ ” and “ $x$  is round in  $p$ ,” respectively.

We are now in a position to correct (16) by putting forth a more accurate depiction of the experiential-imaginative discrimination. Let the Greek letter “ $\pi$ ” be a constant term denoting the possible world in which the experience occurs. We can use this term to depict the experiential-imaginative discrimination as follows:

$$(18) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{VE: } \exists x [\text{Red}_\pi(x) \ \& \ \exists F \exists G (\text{Shade}(F) \ \& \ \text{Shade}(G) \ \& \ F \neq G \ \& \ F_\pi(x) \ \& \ G_\theta(\theta))] \\ \text{VI: } \exists x \exists p [\text{PossibleWorld}(p) \ \& \ \text{Red}_p(x)] \end{array}$$

Here what are imagined are both an object and a possible world containing the object. The demonstrative constant “ $\theta$ ” does double duty. The first token, which occurs as a subscript attached to the predicate “ $G$ ,” might be taken to correspond to the locative demonstrative word “there” and to a use of the locative demonstrative concept THERE. The first token of “ $\theta$ ” is an imaginative demonstrative denoting the imagined possible world. The second token of “ $\theta$ ” is an imaginative demonstrative denoting the imagined object.

So much for the demonstrative solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination. The second solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination is the broad-visual-state

solution. According to this solution, visual experiences, visual memories, and visual images do not exist as separate mental states with separate contents. What exist at the most concrete level are “broad visual states.” These states have mixed contents—contents with parts concerning the present, actual world; parts concerning the past, actual world; and parts concerning various possible worlds. What we call a “visual experience” is just an abstraction from a broad visual state; it’s a broad visual state considered only with regard to the part of its content concerning the present, actual world. Likewise for visual memories and visual images. To illustrate, let’s agree to write “BVS: P” to depict a broad visual state with P as its content, and let’s suppose that you see a red round object and visually remember a green round object. Your mental state might look like this:

$$(19) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists t [\text{Red}_t(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}_t(x) \ \& \ \text{Time}(t) \ \& \ \text{Before}(t, \tau) \ \& \ \text{Green}_t(y) \ \& \ \text{Round}_t(y)]$$

When you see a red round object and visually imagine a green round object, your mental state might look like this:

$$(20) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists p [\text{Red}_\pi(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}_\pi(x) \ \& \ \text{PossibleWorld}(p) \ \& \ \text{Green}_p(y) \ \& \ \text{Round}_p(y)]$$

Now suppose that you simultaneously see a red round object, visually remember a green round object, and visually imagine a yellow round object. Your mental state might look like this:

$$(21) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists z \exists t \exists p [\text{Red}_{\tau, \pi}(x) \ \& \ \text{Round}_{\tau, \pi}(x) \ \& \ \text{Time}(t) \ \& \ \text{Before}(t, \tau) \ \& \ \text{Green}_{t, \pi}(y) \ \& \ \text{Round}_{t, \pi}(y) \ \& \ \text{PossibleWorld}(p) \ \& \ \text{Yellow}_{\tau, p}(z) \ \& \ \text{Round}_{\tau, p}(z)]$$

To see how the broad-visual-state solution works, let’s first take the case in which you see a shade of red and discriminate it from a very similar shade of red you saw yesterday and now only remember. We can depict your mental state as follows:

$$(22) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists t [\text{Red}_t(x) \& \text{Time}(t) \& \text{Before}(t, \tau) \& \text{Red}_t(y) \& \exists F \exists G (\text{Shade}(F) \& \text{Shade}(G) \& F \neq G \& F_\tau(x) \& G_t(y))]$$

In the case in which you see a shade of red and imagine a shade of red that is very similar but different, we can depict your mental state as follows:

$$(23) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists p [\text{Red}_\pi(x) \& \text{PossibleWorld}(p) \& \text{Red}_p(x) \& \exists F \exists G (\text{Shade}(F) \& \text{Shade}(G) \& F \neq G \& F_\pi(x) \& G_p(y))]$$

For the sake of completeness, let's also consider a case of a three-way discrimination among a seen shade of red, a remembered shade of red, and an imagined shade of red. Our depiction might look like this:

$$(24) \quad \text{BVS: } \exists x \exists y \exists z \exists t \exists p [\text{Red}_{\tau, \pi}(x) \& \text{Time}(t) \& \text{Before}(t, \tau) \& \text{Red}_{t, \pi}(y) \& \text{PossibleWorld}(p) \& \text{Red}_{\tau, p}(z) \& \exists F \exists G \exists H (\text{Shade}(F) \& \text{Shade}(G) \& \text{Shade}(H) \& F \neq G \& F \neq H \& G \neq H \& F_{\tau, \pi}(x) \& G_{t, \pi}(y) \& H_{\tau, p}(z))]$$

So much for the broad-visual-state solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination. This problem arose as a problem for the unsophisticated relational-concepts reply to the discriminative f-o-g argument, and we said that the problem could be solved only by exchanging the unsophisticated reply for one or the other of two sophisticated versions. We may now define the first sophisticated version as the one that embraces the demonstrative solution to the problem of trans-modal discrimination, and the second sophisticated version as the one that embraces the broad-visual-state solution. I submit that each of these sophisticated relational-concepts replies is a satisfactory reply to the discriminative f-o-g argument.

#### *4. The Introspective Fineness-of-Grain Argument*

The idea behind the introspective form of the f-o-g argument is that we can directly introspect that our experiential contents are too fine-grained to be captured by the concepts we possess. Let's call the property of being too fine-grained to be captured by the concepts

we possess “extra-conceptual fineness-of-grain,” or, for short, “extra-conceptual f-o-g.” According to the introspective f-o-g argument, we can directly introspect that our experiential contents are extra-conceptually fine-grained. From this premise it immediately follows that conceptualism is false and non-conceptualism is true.

Heck seems to me to be making the introspective f-o-g argument in the quote from him above. Even though Heck makes no explicit reference to introspection, it seems that he must be relying on it. His entire argument is based on consideration of our “perceptual states,” our “experiences,” and the “contents” of these perceptual states and experiences; and introspection seems to be the only faculty via which we could access these things. Our other perceptual faculties, such as vision, seem to tell us only of non-mental things, such as desks, computer speakers, and tree leaves. At any rate, vision does not seem to present anything to us *as* a perceptual state, an experience, or a content of a perceptual state or an experience. Therefore, it seems that vision and our other non-introspective faculties cannot directly support the claim that our experiential contents are extra-conceptually fine-grained. Heck’s argument plainly relies on this claim, and Heck provides no further argument to support it, so it seems that he must be relying on introspection to support it.

My reply to the introspective f-o-g argument takes its cue from a reply that Gilbert Harman makes to an argument against functionalism in the philosophy of mind. Harman describes functionalism as follows:

... functionalism defines mental states and processes by their causal or functional relations to each other and to perceptual inputs from the world outside and behavioral outputs expressed in action. According to functionalism, it is the functional relations that are important, not the intrinsic qualities of the stuff in which these relations are instanced.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harman 1990, p. 32.

We can call the argument against functionalism to which Harman replies the “intrinsic-quality argument.” Here is how Harman expresses the argument:

... when you attend ... to your experience of the redness of an apple, you are aware of an intrinsic quality of your experience, where an intrinsic quality is a quality something has in itself, apart from its relations to other things. This quality of experience cannot be captured in a functional definition, since such a definition is concerned entirely with relations....<sup>19</sup>

Harman approaches his reply to the intrinsic-quality argument by describing a phenomenon that is usually called the “transparency of experience.” Here is what Harman writes:

When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree....<sup>20</sup>

Other philosophers have described the phenomenon of transparency simply by stating that “when we set out to attend to perceptual experience itself, we find ourselves instead attending to the objects around us.”<sup>21</sup> Harman invokes the transparency of experience in his reply to the intrinsic-quality argument. The reply goes as follows:

... this argument fails through confounding a quality of the intentional object of an experience with a quality of the experience itself. When you attend ... to your experience of the redness of an apple, you are attending to ... a quality of the apple. Perhaps this quality is presented to you ... as an intrinsic quality of the surface of the apple. But it is not at all presented as an intrinsic quality of your experience. And, since you are not aware of the intrinsic character of your experience, the fact that functionalism abstracts from the intrinsic character of experience does not show it leaves out anything you are aware of.<sup>22</sup>

In the passage just quoted, Harman speaks of the “intentional object” of an experience, and it is clear that he holds that the intentional object of a visual experience of an apple is an apple.

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<sup>19</sup> Harman 1990, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Harman 1990, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Gendler and Hawthorne 2006, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Harman 1990, p. 41.

Harman points out that some experiences have intentional objects that do not exist. For example, a hallucinatory visual experience of an apple might have as its intentional object an apple that does not exist. According to Harman, the fact that some experiences have non-existent intentional objects is no more metaphysically problematic than the fact that Juan Ponce de León searched for the non-existent Fountain of Youth.<sup>23</sup>

Harman speaks of both intentional *objects* of experiences and intentional *contents* of experiences. It is not entirely clear how he takes these two notions to be related; sometimes he seems to use them interchangeably. Whatever Harman may think, I want to insist that these two notions are distinct. The intentional object of an experience is just what the experience is an experience *of*. A visual experience of an apple has as its intentional object an apple, which may or may not exist. We should note that the intentional object of an experience need not be a concrete individual like an apple; it can just as easily be an abstract property or relation like the apple's color. Indeed, when Harman replies to the intrinsic-quality argument, he speaks of "your experience of the redness of an apple." This "ontological promiscuity" of the intentional objects of experiences—the fact that the objects can be either concrete or abstract—seems to me to be closely related to the fact that, in ordinary language, we speak equally easily of seeing concrete individuals, such as apples, and of seeing abstract properties and relations, such as colors. One final point to make about intentional objects of experiences is that, in general, there will be no such thing as *the* intentional object of a given experience. A given experience will have multiple intentional objects. A visual experience of an apple next to an orange will have as intentional objects both an apple and an orange, as well as other objects in the subject's visual field, and the colors and other visible properties of all these objects.

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<sup>23</sup> Harman 1990, pp. 34 – 38.



Now, we should not assume that an intentional *object* of an experience will be identical to the intentional *content*, or to any part of the intentional content. The intentional content could be something like a proposition saying that the world is a certain way. For instance, the intentional content of a visual experience of an apple could be a proposition saying, among other things, that there is a red round apple—or simply a red round object—ahead and to the right, five feet away. The apple, which is an intentional object, need not be identical to any part of this proposition.

We saw above that Harman's reply to the intrinsic-quality argument invokes the transparency of experience. The point of this invocation is simply to support the claim that the argument's premise is false—that is, to support the claim that we are not aware of intrinsic properties of our experiences. Harman also attempts to explain why the argument's proponent mistakenly believes the false premise. The explanation is that the proponent fails to recognize the intentionality of experiences, and so fails to recognize that experiences have intentional objects. This failure makes the proponent susceptible to the fallacious "argument from illusion," which is a two-step argument. Harman describes the first step as follows:

This argument begins with the uncontroversial premise that the way things are presented in perception is not always the way they are. Eloise sees some brown and green. But there is nothing brown and green before her; it is all an illusion or hallucination. From this the argument fallaciously infers that the brown and green Eloise sees is not external to her and so must be internal or mental.<sup>24</sup>

The idea here is that Eloise is aware of brown and green, and of something that is brown and green. By hypothesis, there is no non-mental brown and green thing for her to be aware of. The argument's proponent can see nothing to identify the brown and green thing with other than Eloise's visual experience, so the proponent identifies the brown and green thing with the experience. The proponent then concludes that the brown and green are intrinsic

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<sup>24</sup> Harman 1990, p. 35.

properties of her experience. The problem with this step, according to Harman, is that the argument's proponent overlooks the experience's intentional object, which is what the brown and green thing is, and what the brown and green are intrinsic properties of. The argument's second step, which Harman does not challenge, simply generalizes the conclusion of the first step by claiming that all experiences, veridical and non-veridical, have intrinsic properties of which the experiences' subjects are aware.<sup>25</sup>

We have seen that Harman's reply to the intrinsic-quality argument has three main parts: a denial of the argument's premise, an invocation of the transparency of experience to support the claim that the premise is false, and an explanation of why the argument's proponent mistakenly believes the false premise. I now wish to offer a parallel reply to the introspective f-o-g argument. I will deny the argument's premise, invoke the transparency of experience to support the claim that the premise is false, and explain why the argument's proponent mistakenly believes the false premise.

First, I deny the premise of the introspective f-o-g argument. I deny that we can directly introspect that our experiential contents are extra-conceptually fine-grained. Harman holds that the intrinsic-quality argument "fails through confounding a quality of the intentional object of an experience with a quality of the experience itself." In Harman's example of an experience of the redness of an apple, he seems to be thinking of the apple as the intentional object and the redness as the confounded quality. I hold that the introspective f-o-g argument fails through confounding a property of the intentional object of an experience with a property, not of the experience itself, but of the experiential *content*. The confounded property is extra-conceptual f-o-g. In order to say what the intentional object with the confounded property is, we must focus on a particular experience. Let's focus on a

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<sup>25</sup> Harman 1990, p. 35.

visual experience of an apple. One intentional object of this experience is the apple, and another is the apple's color. But the expression "the apple's color" is misleading because it suggests that the apple has only one color. This suggestion is false, even if the apple is uniformly colored. The apple has both more determinable colors, like red, and more determinate colors or shades, like crimson. Let's assume that there is a most determinate color that the apple has. The apple's most determinate color is, like the apple, an intentional object of the experience. If we assume that the apple's most determinate color is extra-conceptually fine-grained, we can say that, in this example, the apple's most determinate color is the intentional object with the confounded property.

To say that extra-conceptual f-o-g is the confounded property in this example is to say that it is a property of the intentional object but not of the content. We saw earlier that the intentional object of an experience need not be identical to any part of the content. The content of the experience of the apple could be a proposition saying, among other things, that there is a red round apple—or simply a red round object—ahead and to the right, five feet away. The apple, which is an intentional object of the experience, need not be identical to any part of this proposition. I am suggesting that the apple's most determinate color, which is another intentional object of the experience, is distinct from every part of the content. If this suggestion is correct, then the apple's most determinate color can be extra-conceptually fine-grained without the content being extra-conceptually fine-grained.

I expect resistance to the suggestion I am making. Someone might allow that a concrete individual, like an apple, can be an intentional object of an experience without being identical to any part of the content; but this same person might deny that an abstract property or relation, like a color, can be an intentional object of an experience without being identical

to any part of the content. I reply that there is nothing problematic about the idea of an abstract property or relation being an intentional object of an experience without being identical to any part of the content. We need only imagine an experience whose content is most perspicuously expressed by a sentence in second-order predicate logic—a sentence that quantifies over abstract, first-order properties and relations, predicates second-order properties and relations of them, and predicates them of concrete individuals. For instance, imagine a visual experience whose content is most perspicuously depicted by something like the following sentence:

$$(25) \quad \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \exists F (\text{Shade}(F) \ \& \ F(x))]$$

A certain shade of red might be an intentional object of this experience without being identical to any part of the content. Now let's return to our earlier example of the visual experience of the apple. I submit that the apple's most determinate color can be an intentional object of the experience, without being identical to any part of the content, if the content is most perspicuously expressed by something like the following sentence:

$$(26) \quad \exists x [\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \exists F (\text{Shade}(F) \ \& \ F(x) \ \& \ \sim \exists G (\text{Shade}(G) \ \& \ \text{MoreDeterminate}(G,F) \ \& \ G(x)))]$$

Someone might object at this point that my denial of the premise of the introspective f-o-g argument is far less plausible than Harman's denial of the premise of the intrinsic-quality argument. Harman claims that the intrinsic-quality argument confounds an apple's redness with a property of a visual experience of which the apple is an intentional object. This claim is plausible, the objector might say, because the visual experience *represents* the apple's redness. The experience does not represent the apple's mass, and it is much harder to imagine someone confounding the apple's mass with a property of the visual experience. I claim that the introspective f-o-g argument confounds extra-conceptual f-o-g with a property

of the content of a visual experience of which an extra-conceptually fine-grained property is an intentional object. But, the objection goes, extra-conceptual f-o-g does not seem like a property the visual experience represents, or a property any visual experience could represent. Extra-conceptual f-o-g is defined as being too fine-grained to be captured by the concepts we possess. This definition seems to make the property too complex for any visual experience to represent. Therefore, it is implausible to suppose that anyone would confound it with a property of a visual experience, or of the content of a visual experience.

This objection invokes the notion of an experience representing something. It seems reasonable to suppose that a sufficient condition for an experience to represent something is that the thing should be an intentional object of the experience. My reply to the objection is that extra-conceptual f-o-g can be an intentional object of a visual experience when vision is supplemented by memory and visual imagination.

I can develop this reply by describing what I believe to be involved in the process of learning that some property, such as a color, is extra-conceptually fine-grained. I submit that, in a typical case, the learning process goes as follows: You see an apple's most determinate color, and the color is an intentional object of your visual experience. You start *describing* this color. Maybe you describe it out loud in words, or just internally in thought. You say or think "It's red, it's crimson, it's a relatively light shade of crimson," and so forth. Whether you're speaking or just thinking, you are engaged in a cognitive process that deploys concepts and applies them to the color described. The descriptive process is, obviously, guided by your visual experience. Less obviously, the descriptive process is guided by memory. At each point in the process, you remember what you've said or thought so far. This memory is necessary to keep you from repeating what you've already said, or rethinking

what you've already thought. At some point the descriptive process halts. Words fail or thought fails. You can't think of anything else to say or think that you haven't already said or thought. It's at this point that you learn that the color is extra-conceptually fine-grained. The learning involves both vision and memory, which we've already mentioned, and visual imagination. When words fail or thought fails, you visually imagine a second color that is different from the first color but still fits the description you've given of the first color. What tells you that the two colors are different is a visual, experiential-imaginative discrimination of the sort described earlier in my reply to the discriminative f-o-g argument. What tells you that the second color fits the description you've given of the first color is your memory of the description. From these two pieces of information you learn that the first color is extra-conceptually fine-grained. Thus you learn from an interplay of vision, memory, and visual imagination that the first color is extra-conceptually fine-grained. Now I submit that in this case of learning it's perfectly reasonable to say that extra-conceptual f-o-g is an intentional object of the visual experience, and that the experience represents extra-conceptual f-o-g. Of course, this intentional object is shared by the experience, the memory, and the image, and these three mental states work together to represent the intentional object. But this fact about working together is consistent with the simple claim that the experience represents the intentional object. By analogy, the striking of a match works together with the dryness of the match and the presence of oxygen to cause the lighting of the match, but the simple claim that the striking causes the lighting is true.

I have been describing the first part of my reply to the introspective f-o-g argument: the denial of the argument's premise. I deny that we can directly introspect that our

experiential contents are extra-conceptually fine-grained. I will merely sketch the second and third parts of my reply.

The second part is an invocation of the transparency of experience to support the claim that the premise of the introspective f-o-g argument is false. Transparency is usually understood as a phenomenon in which our attempts to attend to our experiences and their properties result only in attending to the experiences' intentional objects and their properties. This is how Harman seems to understand transparency when he invokes it to convince us that the premise of the intrinsic-quality argument is false. I suggest that transparency can also be understood as a phenomenon in which our attempts to attend to our experiential *contents* and their properties result only in attending to the experiences' intentional objects and their properties. Take the kind of case we have been considering: a visual experience of an apple's most determinate color. I hold that, when you attempt to attend to this experience's content and its extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof), you end up attending, not to the content or its extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof), but to the apple's most determinate color and its extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof).

Let me describe in a bit more detail what I take to occur when you attempt to attend to an experiential content's extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof). I believe that this attempt is an attempt to become aware of the extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof) in a certain way, an attentive way. Becoming aware of something is learning of it. Earlier I described what I take to be the process whereby we learn of the extra-conceptual f-o-g of the intentional object of a visual experience—a process involving an interplay of vision, memory, and visual imagination. I submit that, if an experiential content had extra-conceptual f-o-g and we could learn of it, the learning would occur by an analogous process—a process involving an

interplay of introspection, memory, and “introspective imagination.” We would introspect the experiential content, describe it until words failed or thought failed, and introspectively imagine a second experiential content different from the first but still fitting the description. I hold that, when you attempt to learn of the extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof) of the content of a visual experience, you attempt to engage in the learning process involving introspection, memory, and introspective imagination, but you end up engaging only in the learning process involving vision, memory, and visual imagination. The ultimate result is learning of, becoming aware of, and attending to the extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof) of the experience’s intentional object, without learning of, becoming aware of, or attending to the extra-conceptual f-o-g (or lack thereof) of the content.

The third part of my reply to the introspective f-o-g argument is an explanation of why the argument’s proponent mistakenly believes the argument’s false premise—that is, believes that we can introspect that our experiential contents are extra-conceptually fine-grained. In the corresponding part of Harman’s reply to the intrinsic-quality argument, he accuses the argument’s proponent of failing to recognize the intentionality of experiences, and so of failing to recognize that experiences have intentional objects. According to Harman, these failings make the proponent susceptible to the fallacious argument from illusion, which leads to the intrinsic-quality argument’s false premise. I cannot make these same accusations against the proponent of the introspective f-o-g argument. But I can, and do, accuse the proponent of failing to distinguish intentional objects of experiences from experiential contents and their parts. The proponent fails to recognize that experiences have intentional objects *distinct from* the experiences’ contents and their parts. Were it not for this



failing, I submit, the proponent would not attribute to experiential contents the extra-conceptual f-o-g that belongs only to intentional objects of experiences.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE LEARNING ARGUMENT

Adina Roskies makes an argument against conceptualism—and hence for non-conceptualism—called the “argument from concept learning” or the “learning argument.”<sup>1</sup> The basic idea of the learning argument is that conceptualism is inconsistent with the fact that we learn new concepts on the basis of experiences with corresponding contents. To take a particular example, the learning argument says that conceptualism is inconsistent with the fact that we learn the concept RED on the basis of experiences representing redness. In this chapter I examine the learning argument and defend conceptualism from it.

Roskies’ presentation of the learning argument is complicated and somewhat opaque. I will first relay Roskies’ presentation of the argument, and then recast the argument in a simpler and more transparent form. Roskies presents the argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of conceptualism. She takes it for granted that the concept RED is learned—not innate—and she derives the conclusion that RED is not learned from the assumption that conceptualism is true. The derivation has eight steps, which I quote *verbatim*:

- (1) The content of experience is entirely conceptual.
- (2) If the concept RED is learned, it is learned on the basis of visual experiences with content representing a red object (R experiences).
- (3) Having R experiences is due to the thinker being in a conceptual representational state.
- (4) Having R experiences due to being in a conceptual state either involves deployment of the concept RED or it involves the deployment of other concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> Roskies 2008.

(5) If having R experiences involves the concept RED, then the subject already possesses the concept RED, and so there is no tenable explanation available as to how that experience is responsible for the acquisition of such a concept.

(6) If having R experiences doesn't involve the concept RED, then learning the concept RED on the basis of R experiences requires that, in the process of its acquisition, the content of the concept is compositionally built up from other concepts the thinker possesses.

(7) The concept RED is not compositionally built up from other concepts.

(8) The concept RED is not learned.<sup>2</sup>

In this derivation, step 1 implies step 3, steps 3 and 4 imply step 6, steps 6 and 7 imply the antecedent of step 5, and step 5 and its antecedent imply the consequent of step 5. Roskies seems to infer the negation of the consequent of step 2 from the consequent of step 5, and step 8 from step 2 and the negation of its consequent.<sup>3</sup>

We can recast the learning argument in a simpler and more transparent form that suppresses some of the less significant aspects of the reasoning. This recast version of the argument is not a *reductio ad absurdum*, but a direct argument for the falsehood of conceptualism. The recast version of the argument retains Roskies' abbreviation of "experiences representing redness" as "R experiences." Here is the recast version of the argument:

### The Learning Argument

A. If conceptualism is true, then the subjects of R experiences possess RED and deploy it in the R experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Roskies 2008, pp. 637 – 638.

<sup>3</sup> Roskies is not the first philosopher to appeal to concept learning to argue for non-conceptualism. See Bermúdez 2007, p. 61; Peacocke 2001a, p. 252; and Tye 2005, p. 228. Alva Noë finds such an argument in Dretske 1993 and Dretske 1995 and responds to it (Noë 1999, §IV). Richard Heck presents a similar argument as a criticism of John McDowell's version of conceptualism (Heck 2000, p. 492). Roskies' learning argument is not entirely original, but it is far better developed than its forerunners.

B. If the subjects of R experiences possess RED and deploy it in the R experiences, then R experiences cannot account for or explain the learning of RED.

C. If R experiences do not account for or explain the learning of RED, then RED is not learned on the basis of R experiences.

D. RED is learned on the basis of R experiences.

E. Therefore, conceptualism is false.

Premise A of this argument corresponds to steps 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 in Roskies' original derivation. Premise B corresponds to step 5. Premise C corresponds to the inference of the negation of the consequent of step 2 from the consequent of step 5. Premise D corresponds to step 2 and the claim that RED is learned, which Roskies takes for granted. The recast version of the learning argument is valid, and I am happy to grant premises A and D. Hence we need to focus on premises B and C in evaluating the argument.

Premise B is this:

If the subjects of R experiences possess RED and deploy it in the R experiences, then R experiences cannot account for or explain the learning of RED.

This premise corresponds to step 5 in Roskies' original derivation, which is this:

If having R experiences involves the concept RED, then the subject already possesses the concept RED, and so there is no tenable explanation available as to how that experience is responsible for the acquisition of such a concept.

The only argument Roskies makes for step 5 is the following statement: "Step 5 rules out the possibility of RED being deployed in representing redness as an account of how RED is learned, for certainly such an account is circular."<sup>4</sup> The reasoning here seems to be that the possession of RED and its deployment in an R experience presupposes the learning of RED. Therefore, to appeal to the possession of RED and its deployment in an R experience to account for or explain the learning of RED is to go in a circle. Therefore, the possession of

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<sup>4</sup> Roskies 2008, p. 639.

RED and its deployment in an R experience cannot account for or explain the learning of RED. Therefore, step 5 is true.

The problem with this reasoning comes at the very end, when step 5 is inferred from the claim “The possession of RED and its deployment in an R experience cannot account for or explain the learning of RED.” Step 5 does not follow from this claim. For step 5 denies the possibility of the learning of RED being accounted for or explained by an R experience in which RED is deployed by a subject possessing RED, not the possibility of the learning of RED being accounted for or explained by the possession of RED and its deployment in an R experience. There is a difference between an R experience in which RED is deployed by a subject possessing RED, and the possession of RED and its deployment in the R experience. The latter thing is a constituent of the former thing.

It seems that the conceptualist could try to resist step 5, and premise B, by adopting the following position: The subjects of R experiences possess RED and deploy it in the R experiences, and this possession and deployment is constitutive of the R experiences. Concept learning is just concept possession coming into existence. It sometimes occurs that the subject of an R experience possesses RED and deploys it in the R experience, and that the possession of RED comes into existence at the same time as the R experience. On these occasions, the possession of RED is the learning of RED, and the learning of RED is constitutive of the R experience. Therefore, some R experiences have the learning of RED as a constituent. These R experiences account for or explain the learning of RED. The account or explanation is a non-causal, constitutive account or explanation. The proponent of this position might try to draw an analogy with cases like the following: Suzy’s whole class is at the museum on a field trip at time t, and Suzy is at the museum at time t. The former state of

affairs has the latter state of affairs as a constituent. There is some sense to the claim that the former states of affairs does not cause the latter state of affairs but nevertheless accounts for or explains it. If Suzy's neighbor saw Suzy at the museum at time *t*, was surprised, called Suzy's parents, and was told that Suzy's whole class was at the museum on a field trip at time *t*, the neighbor would probably feel that Suzy's presence at the museum at time *t* had been accounted for or explained.

At one point Roskies criticizes a position like the one I am suggesting. She writes the following:

One may think that the conceptualist may deny 5 because he holds that in having an experience of redness one comes to have the concept RED: having the experience *is* acquiring the concept. However, there is no argument available as to why the mere fact that one has an experience with a certain content is an acceptable account of concept *acquisition*.<sup>5</sup>

Here Roskies seems to reject out of hand the possibility of a non-causal, constitutive account or explanation of the learning of RED by an R experience having it as a constituent. This rejection is probably too quick, but there is some room to wonder whether non-causal, constitutive accounts or explanations of anything are possible. We suggested earlier that the fact that Suzy's whole class is at the museum on a field trip at time *t* non-causally, constitutively explains or accounts for the fact that Suzy is at the museum at time *t*. But perhaps the former fact only appears to explain the latter fact, and perhaps the former fact creates this appearance by combining with our background knowledge about classes, museums, field trips, and time *t* to suggest a causal explanation. The conceptualist can try to resist step 5, and premise B, by adopting the position that some R experiences have the learning of RED as a constituent and non-causally, constitutively account for or explain it. But this position must be attended with some doubt.

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<sup>5</sup> Roskies 2008, p. 639, italics in original.

Let's turn to an examination of premise C, which is this:

If R experiences do not account for or explain the learning of RED, then RED is not learned on the basis of R experiences.

Roskies' only explicit argument for this premise is that to deny it is "to deny that there is any scientifically viable explanation of how [concept] acquisition works."<sup>6</sup> Someone who denies premise C affirms the antecedent and denies the consequent. This person holds that R experiences do not account for or explain the learning of RED, and that RED is learned on the basis of R experiences. According to Roskies, this combination of views implies that there is no scientifically viable account of how concept acquisition works. Roskies is mistaken. The conceptualist can deny premise C and hold that there is a scientifically viable account of how concept acquisition works. The conceptualist can do so by adopting the following position: Some R experiences have the learning of RED as a constituent but do not account for or explain it. RED is learned on the basis of these R experiences. The R experiences are causally explained by sub-personal factors, and these sub-personal factors also causally explain the learning of RED, which is a constituent of the R experiences. This causal explanation of the learning of RED by the sub-personal factors that explain the R experiences having it as a constituent is a scientifically viable explanation of how the acquisition of RED works.

Roskies would probably balk at this position. At a number of points, she criticizes the idea that concept learning is a "brute causal process."<sup>7</sup> She describes such a process as one "dependent upon external input that leads to changes at some physiological level, but does not require any attention or cognitive effort or awareness at the person-level for it to occur,"

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<sup>6</sup> Roskies 2008, p. 639.

<sup>7</sup> Roskies 2008, pp. 638, 643 – 645, 652 – 654.

and as one “not open to awareness, or not available to the subject at the person-level.”<sup>8</sup> She also equates the claim that “concept learning is a brute causal phenomenon” with the claim that “concept learning does not require awareness.”<sup>9</sup> A succinct statement of her reason for denying that concept learning is a brute causal process is this: “... to view concept learning as just a brute-causal event with person-level sequelae would be to fail to *explain* concept acquisition—the transition from brute-causation to subjective access to content would remain a mystery.”<sup>10</sup>

Faced with the claim that learning RED is causally explained by the sub-personal factors causally explaining R experiences having it as a constituent, Roskies would probably reject the claim as an instance of the idea that concept learning is a brute causal process. My reply to this rejection is twofold. First, I deny that the rejected claim implies that learning RED is a brute causal process. It is consistent with the rejected claim that learning RED should require awareness at the person-level. Second, I deny that there is any reason to believe the conditional claim that, if concept learning is a brute causal process, it cannot explain person-level phenomena like concept possession. It seems absurd to deny that brute causal processes can explain person-level phenomena. If there was ever a time when there were no person-level phenomena, then there must be some explanation of how they came into existence. And it seems that this explanation must consist of brute causal processes.

I have suggested that the conceptualist can resist the learning argument by adopting a position according to which RED is learned on the basis of R experiences having the learning of RED as a constituent. We can generalize this position to the position that, whenever a

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<sup>8</sup> Roskies 2008, pp. 643, 652.

<sup>9</sup> Roskies 2008, p. 652.

<sup>10</sup> Roskies 2008, pp. 644 – 645, italics in original; see also Roskies 2008, pp. 643, 652 – 654.



concept is learned on the basis of an experience with a corresponding content, the experience has the learning as a constituent. Let's call this position "constitutive conceptualism." I wish to conclude this chapter by answering two objections to constitutive conceptualism.

The first objection is that constitutive conceptualism is inconsistent with the fact that we often learn a concept over time on the basis of multiple experiences with a corresponding content, *e.g.*, that we learn RED over time on the basis of multiple experiences representing redness. I reply that this charge of inconsistency is false. Concept possession is a mental state, and like most mental states, it can come into existence gradually over time. Concept learning is just concept possession coming into existence, so concept learning can occur gradually over time. When a subject learns RED gradually over time on the basis of multiple experiences representing redness, the subject comes, with each experience, to count more and more as possessing RED. Eventually the subject counts as possessing RED to the fullest degree possible, but there is no precise point at which the subject changes from simply not possessing RED to simply possessing RED. There is no unique, first moment at which the subject possesses RED. Learning RED is like going bald. The constitutive conceptualist can hold that, when a subject learns RED gradually over time on the basis of multiple experiences representing redness, the experiences come to count more and more as experiences in which RED is deployed, and more and more as experiences representing redness. Eventually the experiences count as representing redness to the fullest degree possible, but there is no precise point at which the experiences change from simply not representing redness to simply representing redness. There is no unique, first experience representing redness. This state of affairs strikes me as one that it is perfectly appropriate to

describe as “learning RED over time on the basis of multiple experiences representing redness.”

The second objection is that constitutive conceptualism has the absurd implication that RED is learned in virtue of the deployment of RED. (Roskies approaches this objection when she suggests that a conceptualist explanation of the learning of RED would be circular.) The claim that constitutive conceptualism has this implication follows from two suppositions. According to the first supposition, RED is learned, on the basis of experiences representing redness, in virtue of the representation of redness by the experiences. The reason RED (rather than BLUE or GREEN) is learned on the basis of the experiences is that the experiences represent redness (rather than blueness or greenness). According to the second supposition, constitutive conceptualism implies that experiences representing redness represent redness in virtue of the deployment of RED in the experiences. Constitutive conceptualism implies that the reason the experiences represent redness (rather than blueness or greenness) is that RED (rather than BLUE or GREEN) is deployed in the experiences. It follows from these two suppositions that constitutive conceptualism implies that RED is learned in virtue of the deployment of RED.

I reply that the constitutive conceptualist can deny the first supposition. He can hold that RED is learned, on the basis of experiences representing redness, in virtue of the fact that, in having the experiences, the subject comes to possess RED. And the subject comes to possess RED in virtue of the fact that the subject comes to be in a state—the state of possessing RED—that bears a certain relation to redness. This relation is exceedingly complicated, and describing it in any detail is a task far exceeding the scope of this chapter. The task belongs to the broader philosophical project of naturalizing intentionality. For now,

I can describe the relation between the state of possessing RED and redness only in the vaguest possible terms: The state disposes the subject to interact with redness and red objects in a certain way, *viz.*, the way possessors of RED typically interact with redness and red objects.

Non-conceptualism and constitutive conceptualism have complementary strengths and weaknesses. The non-conceptualist easily answers the question “In virtue of what is RED learned on the basis of experiences representing redness?” Her answer is the representation of redness by the experiences. The constitutive conceptualist does not easily answer this question. His answer is the fact that, in having the experiences, the subject comes to be in a state that bears a certain relation to redness. If he is pressed for more details about the relation, he must concede that it is exceedingly complicated, and that the task of describing it any detail is enormous. The task belongs to the broader philosophical project of naturalizing intentionality. By contrast, the constitutive conceptualist easily answers the question “In virtue of what do experiences representing redness represent redness?” His answer is the deployment of RED in the experiences. The non-conceptualist does not easily answer this question. Her answer is a certain relation between the experiences and redness. If she is pressed for more details about the relation, she must concede that it is exceedingly complicated, and that the task of describing it any detail is enormous. The task belongs to the broader philosophical project of naturalizing intentionality. Whatever reason concept learning gives us for preferring non-conceptualism is balanced by an equally good reason for preferring constitutive conceptualism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the ideas put forth in this chapter are anticipated in Heck 2000, on pp. 492 – 493. My discussion develops these ideas in greater detail. Moreover, my focus is different from Heck’s. I focus on the acquisition of concepts in general, while Heck focuses on the acquisition of demonstrative concepts.

## **PART III**

### **ARGUMENTS FOR CONCEPTUALISM**

## CHAPTER 6

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS FOR CONCEPTUALISM

In this part of the dissertation, which comprises this chapter and the next one, I examine arguments for conceptualism. The best known arguments for conceptualism are epistemological, and their best known exponents are John McDowell and Bill Brewer. In this chapter I identify five epistemological arguments for conceptualism that appear in the writings of McDowell and Brewer, and I try to show that all of them are unconvincing. In the next chapter I turn away from epistemology and begin to develop what I believe to be a promising new argument for conceptualism.

All of McDowell's and Brewer's epistemological arguments for conceptualism concern the justification of empirical beliefs by experiences. I find three arguments in McDowell's writings, and I call them the "Implication Argument," the "Scrutiny Argument," and the "Articulation Argument." I find two arguments in Brewer's writings, and I call them the "Inference Argument" and the "Recognition Argument." This chapter is divided into five sections, examining these five arguments in turn.

#### *1. McDowell's Implication Argument*

McDowell makes the Implication Argument in the following passage:

... we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgment is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell 1994, p. 7.

Here McDowell is thinking specifically of empirical judgments or beliefs, and of their warrant or justification by experiences. We can express the argument more formally as follows:

#### The Implication Argument

1. Experiences justify beliefs.
2. If an experience justifies a belief, then the experiential content implies or probabilifies the belief content.
3. If an experiential content implies or probabilifies a belief content, then both contents are conceptual.
4. Therefore, experiences have conceptual contents.

It is hard to see why we should accept the third premise of this argument. Contents, whether conceptual or non-conceptual, are usually thought of as the kinds of things that can be accurate or inaccurate (with truth and falsehood being special cases of accuracy and inaccuracy). Let C and D be contents, and let one or the other or both be non-conceptual. If the joint accuracy of C and inaccuracy of D is impossible, it seems perfectly natural to say C implies D. If the joint accuracy of C and inaccuracy of D is improbable, it seems perfectly natural to say C probabilifies D. Perhaps we were first introduced to the notions of implication and probabilification in an elementary logic class in which the relations were attributed to declarative sentences or propositions expressed in language—written premises stacked neatly above a written conclusion. Since declarative sentences and propositions expressed in language have conceptual contents, we may have learned to associate the relations primarily with conceptual contents. But this learned association is no reason to refuse to attribute the relations to non-conceptual contents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> At some points McDowell seems to concede that non-conceptual contents can stand in relations of implication and probabilification; see McDowell 1994, pp. 53, 162. At these points, McDowell goes on to assert that a state

## *2. McDowell's Scrutiny Argument*

McDowell refers to the exercise of concepts as “spontaneity.” He uses this language to express the Scrutiny Argument in the following passage:

If [the rational relations between experiences and judgments] are to be genuinely recognizable as reason-constituting, we cannot confine spontaneity within a boundary across which the relations are supposed to hold. The relations themselves must be able to come under the self-scrutiny of active thinking.<sup>3</sup>

McDowell seems to express a similar line of reasoning when he criticizes Christopher Peacocke's non-conceptualism in the following passage:

We can bring into view the rational relations between [two] contents—its being the case that P and its being the case that Q—only by comprehending the putatively grounding content in conceptual terms, even if our theory is that the item that has that content does not do its representing in a conceptual way. A theory like Peacocke's does not credit ordinary subjects with this comprehensive view of the two contents, and I think that leaves it unintelligible how an item with the non-conceptual content that P can be someone's reason for judging that Q.<sup>4</sup>

Here is the argument expressed formally:

### The Scrutiny Argument

1. Experiences justify beliefs.
2. If an experience justifies a belief, then the subject can have a comprehensive view of the experiential content and the belief content and scrutinize the rational relations between them.
3. If a subject can have a comprehensive view of an experiential content and a belief content and scrutinize the rational relations between them, then both contents are conceptual.
4. Therefore, experiences have conceptual contents.

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with a non-conceptual content cannot be a subject's reason for a belief, and therefore cannot justify a belief. Insofar as I can discern an argument at these points, it is the Scrutiny Argument, considered below.

<sup>3</sup> McDowell 1994, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> McDowell 1994, p. 166.

The meaning of the expression “have a comprehensive view of an experiential content and a belief content and scrutinize the rational relations between them” is not entirely clear, but McDowell seems to have in mind cases of the kind that Peacocke and Richard Heck describe in the following two passages:

Consider a subject who knows himself to be in a situation in which he is predictably subject to illusions. He comes, rationally, to think that an experience of a window high in a wall in front of him should, all things considered, not lead him to judge “That window is square”, but rather to judge “That window is longer than it is wide”. This subject needs to be capable of the thought “The window's appearing in that way doesn't in these circumstances mean that it really is so”.<sup>5</sup>

Suppose that I am presently perceiving a stick, partially immersed in water, that appears to be bent; yet I do not form a belief that the stick is bent. Why not? Presumably, it is because I have learned from past experience that a perceptual state with this kind of content does not give me sufficiently good reason to hold such a belief.<sup>6</sup>

What seems to lie behind the third premise of the Scrutiny Argument is another argument, which we may call the “Thought Argument.” Here it is:

#### The Thought Argument

1. To have a comprehensive view of an experiential content and a belief content, and to scrutinize the rational relations between them, is to think about each of the contents.
2. To think about a content is to have a thought whose content has the content thought about as a part.
3. Thought contents are wholly conceptual.
4. Therefore, if a subject can have a comprehensive view of an experiential content and a belief content and scrutinize the rational relations between them, then both contents are conceptual.

Most philosophers who have criticized McDowell's Scrutiny Argument have focused their criticisms on the second premise of the Thought Argument—the premise stating that to

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<sup>5</sup> Peacocke 1998, p. 386.

<sup>6</sup> Heck 2000, p. 512.



think about a content is to have a thought whose content has the content thought about as a part. For instance, Jeff Speaks writes the following:

... in general, having a thought about  $x$  does not imply that  $x$  is part of the content of one's thought. We can, after all, think about objects more or less indirectly. There is a sense in which the thought that I would express by saying "The shortest spy in the world is French" is about that individual, whoever he or she is, that is the shortest spy in the world; but that individual is not a part of the content of my thought.<sup>7</sup>

Speaks' reply to McDowell is that we can think about something indirectly by using definite descriptions such as "the shortest spy in the world" or "the content of my experience," and that when we do so the thing indirectly thought about need not be part of the thought content. Peacocke offers a similar reply, though he appeals not to definite descriptions but to demonstrative such as "that spy" and "that content."<sup>8</sup> Heck offers a somewhat different reply. Drawing on Evans's work, he suggests that we can think about our experiential contents by thinking that we would form certain beliefs if we were to form beliefs on the basis of our experiences alone. For instance, someone who had a visual experience of a red round tomato might think about the content of the experience by thinking that he or she would believe that there is a red round tomato if he or she were to form beliefs on the basis of the experience alone. In a case like this, Heck suggests, the thought is about the experiential content, but the experiential content need not be part of the thought content.<sup>9</sup>

To fully appreciate the significance of these replies in the current context, let's look back at Peacocke's and Heck's descriptions of the cases of the high window and the immersed stick. In the case of the high window, Peacocke attributes to the subject the thought "The window's appearing in that way doesn't in these circumstances mean that it

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<sup>7</sup> Speaks 2005, pp. 374 – 375.

<sup>8</sup> Peacocke 1998, pp. 386 – 387; and Peacocke 2001a, pp. 255 – 256.

<sup>9</sup> Heck 2000, §5.

really is so.” For Peacocke, the demonstrative “that way” is a concept referring to the non-conceptual content of the subject’s experience. The demonstrative makes it the case that the thought is indirectly about this non-conceptual content, and that the thought content need not have the non-conceptual content as a part. In the case of the immersed stick, Heck says “I have learned from past experience that a perceptual state with this kind of content does not give me sufficiently good reason to hold [the belief that the stick is bent].” For Heck, the expression “a perceptual state with this kind of content” means “an experience making it the case that I would believe that the stick is bent if I were to form beliefs on the basis of the experience alone.” And for Heck, his thought about what he has learned from past experience is about the non-conceptual content of his (present) experience, but about it in such a way that the thought content need not have the non-conceptual content as a part.

I am sympathetic to all three of the replies from Speaks, Peacocke, and Heck. As we have seen, Speaks and Peacocke give essentially the same reply, with the only difference being that Speaks invokes definite descriptions where Peacocke invokes demonstratives. Let’s speak of a single reply, the “Speaks-Peacocke” reply. Even though I am sympathetic to the Speaks-Peacocke reply, it rests on a contentious assumption I cannot accept. For both Speaks and Peacocke, the definite description or demonstrative refers to the experiential content, making it the case that the thought is about the experiential content indirectly, and that the thought content need not have the experiential content as a part. Both philosophers are working with a Fregean conception of content, according to which a vehicle of content has both a sense and a reference, with the sense combining with the world to determine the reference. And both philosophers assume that the reference of a vehicle of content is no part of the content, *i.e.*, that contents are senses and nothing more. This is the contentious

assumption on which the Speaks-Peacocke reply rests. No doubt “content” is a term of art, and there is no one correct way to use it. Nevertheless, when thinking about content in Fregean terms, I find it most natural to use “content” to refer to a sense and the corresponding reference together. The reason is simply that, within the Fregean conception of content, the sense and the corresponding reference together constitute everything set over against the vehicle of content. I therefore cannot accept the assumption underlying the Speaks-Peacocke reply, and I suspect that many other philosophers would resist the assumption as well.

The Speaks-Peacocke reply contentiously assumes that the reference of a vehicle of content is no part of the content. If we reject this assumption, we can reformulate the reply in a way that retains its force against the Scrutiny Argument. The idea behind the reformulation is that we can understand the properties of conceptuality and non-conceptuality as properties contents have only *relative to* particular mental states of which they are the contents. An ascription of conceptuality or non-conceptuality to a content must always specify a mental state relative to which the property is instantiated, though this specification may be tacit and determined by the context of the ascription. For example, the conclusion of the Scrutiny Argument is “Experiences have conceptual contents,” and this statement tacitly specifies the experiences as the mental states relative to which the contents are conceptual; and the third premise of the Thought Argument is “Thought contents are wholly conceptual,” and this statement tacitly specifies the thoughts as the mental states relative to which the contents are (wholly) conceptual. Roughly speaking, what makes a content conceptual relative to a mental state is the fact that the mental state has the content and captures it with concepts. What

makes a content non-conceptual relative to a mental state is the fact that the mental state has the content but does not capture it with concepts.<sup>10</sup>

If we relativize conceptuality and non-conceptuality to mental states, then a single content can be conceptual relative to one mental state and non-conceptual relative to another mental state. For instance, an experiential content can be non-conceptual relative to the experience; the experience can have the content but not capture it with concepts. At the same time, the experiential content can be conceptual relative to a thought; the thought can have the experiential content as (a part of) its content and capture it with concepts. One way for this to occur is for the thought to refer to the experiential content with a concept that is a definite description or a demonstrative. In this case, the thought has the experiential content as (a part of) its content and captures it with the concept that is a definite description or a demonstrative.

Unlike the original Speaks-Peacocke reply, the reformulated reply accepts the second premise of the Thought Argument—the premise stating that to think about a content is to have a thought whose content has the content thought about as a part. The reformulated reply charges the argument with invalidity. As we already said, the third premise, “Thought contents are wholly conceptual,” means “Thought contents are wholly conceptual relative to the thoughts.” The conclusion is “If a subject can have a comprehensive view of an experiential content and a belief content and scrutinize the rational relations between them, then both contents are conceptual.” The consequent of this conditional, “Both contents are conceptual,” presumably means “The experiential content is conceptual relative to the

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<sup>10</sup> Speaks is careful to distinguish an absolute understanding of conceptuality and non-conceptuality from a relative understanding, and to distinguish between two corresponding interpretations of McDowell’s Scrutiny Argument. However, he gives the reply already discussed to both interpretations of the argument. See Speaks 2005, pp. 373 – 375, 387 – 388.

experience and the belief content is conceptual relative to the belief.” At any rate, the consequent must have this meaning if the Scrutiny Argument is to be valid. For the conclusion of the Thought Argument is the third premise of the Scrutiny Argument, and the conclusion of the Scrutiny Argument is “Experiences have conceptual contents,” which means “Experiences have contents that are conceptual relative to the experiences.” When the full meanings of the third premise of the Thought Argument and the conclusion of the Thought Argument are made explicit, the argument’s invalidity is apparent.

The reformulated Speaks-Peacocke reply paints the following picture: An experience has a content but does not capture it with concepts. Therefore the content is non-conceptual in the experience. The experience justifies a belief, requiring the subject to have a comprehensive view of the experiential content and the belief content, and to scrutinize the rational relations between them. The subject is therefore required to think about the experiential content. The subject thinks about the experiential content by having a thought that uses a concept that is a definite description or a demonstrative to refer to the experiential content. Reference is a form of capturing. The concept captures the experiential content and makes it part of the thought content. The experiential content is therefore conceptual in the thought. The experiential content is simultaneously conceptual in the thought and non-conceptual in the experience.

Someone might worry that this reply actually hands victory to McDowell. For the reply implies that experiential contents *are* conceptual. This worry is based on a confusion. The reply does imply that there are mental states in which experiential contents are conceptual, *viz.*, thoughts referring to them with definite descriptions or demonstratives. But the conceptualist thesis that McDowell is ultimately concerned to defend is the claim that

experiential contents are conceptual in the experiences. The reply does not imply this claim. If the worry persists, three more observations should dispel it. First, the ability of a thought to refer to an experiential content with a definite description or a demonstrative is parasitic upon the fact that the experience has the content. For the definite description in question is something like “the content of my experience,” and the demonstrative is an experiential demonstrative like “that content.” The thought exploits the existence of the experience with the content to secure reference to the content. By contrast, the experience would have the content even if the thought did not exist. Second, if we adopt a Fregean conception of content, an experiential content will not be the content of the experience in the same way that it is (a part of) the content of a thought that refers to it with a definite description or a demonstrative. It will be the sense of the experience, or maybe the sense and the reference together; but it will be only (a part of) the reference of the thought. These first two observations make it appropriate to retain Speaks’ characterization of thoughts about experiential contents as about the contents “indirectly.” Third, thoughts can use definite descriptions and demonstratives to refer to absolutely anything, including rocks and trees. Therefore, rocks and trees can be conceptual (parts of) thought contents. No one would worry that this fact implies any interesting or controversial thesis of “conceptualism about rocks and trees.” Therefore, no one should worry that the fact that experiential contents can be conceptual (parts of) thought contents implies any interesting or controversial thesis of conceptualism about experiential contents. The interesting and controversial thesis of conceptualism about experiential contents states that experiential contents are conceptual in the experiences.

The reformulated Speaks-Peacocke reply to the Thought Argument casts doubt on the argument's validity, and Heck's reply to the Thought Argument casts doubt on the argument's second premise. Since the Thought Argument seems to be the only source of support for the third premise of the Scrutiny Argument, it seems that we have no good reason to believe this premise.

### *3. McDowell's Articulation Argument*

McDowell makes the Articulation Argument in the course of criticizing Peacocke's non-conceptualism as unable to account for the status of experiences as reasons for beliefs. Here is the argument:

In the reflective tradition we belong to, there is a time-honoured connection between reason and discourse. We can trace it back at least as far as Plato: if we try to translate "reason" and "discourse" into Plato's Greek, we can find only one word, *logos*, for both. Now Peacocke cannot respect this connection. He has to sever the tie between reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for thinking that way. Reasons that the subject can give, in so far as they are articulable, must be within the space of concepts.<sup>11</sup>

McDowell goes on to illustrate what he has in mind when he talks about giving and articulating experiential reasons. He writes the following:

... suppose one asks an ordinary subject why she holds some observational belief, say that an object within her field of view is square. An unsurprising reply might be "Because it looks that way". This is easily recognized as giving a reason for holding the belief. ... In that simplest kind of case, what the subject says counts as giving a reason for her belief because the way the object looks is the way she believes it to be. In other cases the connection between reason and belief is less simple. A minimally articulate reply to the request for a reason might have to be less specific, perhaps "Because of the way it looks". But this makes no difference to the essential point. Here, too, the reason is articulable (even if only in the form "It looks like *that*"), so it must be no less conceptual than what it is a reason for.<sup>12</sup>

Here is a formal expression of the Articulation Argument:

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<sup>11</sup> McDowell 1994, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> McDowell 1994, pp. 165 – 166.

### The Articulation Argument

1. Experiences justify beliefs.
2. If an experience justifies a belief, then the experience has a content that the subject can articulate.
3. To articulate a content is to produce a linguistic expression whose content has the articulated content as a part.
4. The contents of linguistic expressions are wholly conceptual.
5. Therefore, experiences have conceptual contents.

McDowell argues for the second premise of this argument when he writes “In the reflective tradition we belong to, there is a time-honoured connection between reason and discourse.” There are at least three different problems with this argument for the second premise. First, McDowell does not make the nature of the “time-honoured connection” clear. Not just any connection would support the second premise. One possible connection between reason and discourse is that reason is necessary for discourse; another possible connection is that reason is sufficient for discourse. The former connection would not support the second premise, though the latter connection might. Second, McDowell adduces almost no evidence to prove that the time-honoured connection exists. One might have expected McDowell to back up his assertion with a brief historical survey. But all he gives us is the fleeting reference to Plato’s Greek, and even this reference seems to prove nothing, since “*logos*” could be ambiguous in meaning. Third, McDowell’s argument for the second premise seems like a fallacious appeal to authority. Even if our reflective tradition connects reason and discourse, it doesn’t follow that we ought to connect them. Our reflective tradition could be mistaken. McDowell’s argument for the second premise is unpersuasive, and by itself the



premise is far from obvious. Cats and dogs cannot articulate anything. These animals may or may not have experientially justified beliefs, but the idea that they do is not absurd.

The third premise of the Articulation Argument states that to articulate a content is to produce a linguistic expression whose content has the articulated content as a part. This premise is in the same boat as the second premise of the Thought Argument, considered above. The second premise of the Thought Argument states that to think about a content is to have a thought whose content has the content thought about as a part. We saw above that Speaks, Peacocke, and Heck all criticize this premise by suggesting ways in which one might think about a content without having a thought whose content has the content thought about as a part. According to Speaks and Peacocke, one might think about the content indirectly by referring to it with a definite description or a demonstrative. According to Heck, in the case of an experiential content, one might think about it by thinking that one would form a certain belief if one were forming beliefs on the basis of the experience alone. Speaks, Peacocke, and Heck all criticize the third premise of the Articulation Argument by suggesting parallel ways in which one might articulate a content without producing a linguistic expression whose content has the articulated content as a part. According to Speaks and Peacocke, one might articulate the content indirectly by referring to it with a linguistic definite description or a linguistic demonstrative. According to Heck, in the case of an experiential content, one might articulate it by saying that one would form a certain belief if one were forming beliefs on the basis of the experience alone.<sup>13</sup>

In one of McDowell's examples of a subject articulating an experiential reason for a belief, she is asked why she believes a certain object to be square, and her reply is "Because

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<sup>13</sup> Speaks 2005, p. 375, n. 21; Peacocke 1998, pp. 383 – 384; Peacocke 2001a, p. 256; and Heck 2000, pp. 519 – 520.

it looks that way.” Presumably the demonstrative “that way” is supposed to be articulating the experiential content. Consonant with the third premise of the Articulation Argument, McDowell assumes that the experiential content must be part of the content of “that way.” Since “that way” is a linguistic demonstrative with a wholly conceptual content, he concludes that the experiential content must be conceptual. However, Peacocke would insist that “that way” articulates the experiential content indirectly by referring to it. While “that way” is a linguistic demonstrative and therefore does have a wholly conceptual content—corresponding to the demonstrative concept THAT WAY—this indirect articulation does not require the experiential content to be part of the content of “that way.”

McDowell defends the third premise of the Articulation Argument against Peacocke’s criticism by noting that “‘that way’ in ‘It looks that way’ is predicative, not substantival.”<sup>14</sup> McDowell’s defense is that, when “that way” is used predicatively, the way in question is a sense expressed by the expression and not a reference referred to by the expression.<sup>15</sup> This defense strikes me as nit-picking. The significance of the Fregean distinction between sense and reference is that the semantic value of an expression can have two parts, with one part combining with the world to determine the other part. This two-part structure obtains for the semantic values of demonstratives regardless of whether they are used substantivally or predicatively. And as long as the two-part structure obtains, McDowell’s defense against Peacocke’s criticism seems ineffective. Perhaps it is not perfectly appropriate to apply the term “reference” to the way in question when “that way” is used predicatively. Nevertheless, the semantic value of “that way” has two parts, with one part combining with the world to determine the other part, which is the way. Peacocke can still insist that “that way”

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<sup>14</sup> McDowell 1998, p. 418.

<sup>15</sup> McDowell 1998, p. 418.

articulates the way indirectly in virtue of the fact that the way is the determined part of the semantic value, and he can still deny that the way is any part of the content of “that way.”

As was the case with the Thought Argument, considered above, Speaks and Peacocke give essentially the same reply to the Articulation Argument, with the only difference being that Speaks invokes definite descriptions where Peacocke invokes demonstratives. Once again, we can speak of a single reply, the “Speaks-Peacocke” reply to the Articulation Argument. Everything said above about the Speaks-Peacocke reply to the Thought Argument goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the Speaks-Peacocke reply to the Articulation Argument. The reply contentiously assumes that the reference of a vehicle of content is no part of the content. We can reject this assumption and reformulate the reply in a way that retains its force against the Articulation Argument. The reformulated reply relativizes conceptuality and non-conceptuality to mental states, accepts the argument’s third premise, and charges the argument with invalidity. According to the reformulated reply, the fourth premise, “The contents of linguistic expressions are wholly conceptual,” presumably means something like “The contents of linguistic expressions are wholly conceptual relative to the thoughts or ideas expressed by the expressions.” The conclusion, “Experiences have conceptual contents,” means “Experiences have contents that are conceptual relative to the experiences.” When the full meanings of the fourth premise and the conclusion are made explicit, the argument’s invalidity is apparent.

#### *4. Brewer’s Inference Argument*

Brewer’s presentation of the Inference Argument is long, but it is highly integrated, so I quote it almost in full:

In the current context, sense experiential states are to provide reasons for the subject’s making a particular judgment, or holding a certain belief, about how things are in the

world around her. To give the subject's reason in this context is to identify some feature of her situation which makes the judgment or belief appropriate, or intelligible, from the point of view of rationality. It is, paraphrasing McDowell (1985, p. 389), to mention considerations which reveal the judgment or belief as at least approximating to what rationally ought to happen in those circumstances. Now, making something intelligible from the point of view of rationality in this way necessarily involves identifying a valid deductive argument, or inference of some other kind, which articulates the source of the rational obligation (or permission) in question. This constitutes an explicit reconstruction of the reasoning in virtue of whose correctness this obligation (or permission) is sustained. For *rational* intelligibility, or appropriateness of the kind revealed by giving reasons, just is that mode of approbation which is made explicit by the reconstruction of *valid reasoning* of some such kind to a conclusion which is suitably related to the judgment or belief for which the reasons are being given. Hence, in making essential reference to the relevant valid inference, giving a reason involves making essential reference to its premises and conclusion, and so, trivially, to the kinds of things which can serve as the premises or conclusion of some kind of inference. In keeping with the standard usage, I call such contents *propositions*. ...giving reasons involves identifying certain relevant propositions—those contents which figure as the premises and conclusions of inferences explicitly articulating the reasoning involved. In particular, sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only in virtue of their appropriate relations with propositions suitably inferentially related to the contents of the beliefs in question.

... we are interested here not just in any old reasons which there may be for making judgments or holding beliefs—such as their simply happening to be true, or beneficial in some mysterious way to the subject's overall well-being—but only in reasons *for the subject* to do these things, to take things actually to be the way she believes them to be. These must be the subject's *own* reasons, which figure as such *from her point of view*, in virtue of her being in the sense experiential states which provide such reasons. It follows from this that the premise propositions, suitably inferentially related to the contents of the beliefs in question, cannot be related to the relevant sense experiential states merely *indirectly*, as some kind of extrinsic characterization on the part of the theorist. Rather, they must actually *be* the contents of these experiential states, in a sense which requires that the subject has all of their constituent concepts. Otherwise, even though being in such states may make it advisable, relative to a certain end or need, for her to make the judgment or hold the belief in question, it cannot provide *her own* reason for doing so. Thus, sense experiential states provide reasons for empirical beliefs only if they have conceptual content....<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Brewer 2005, pp. 218 – 219, italics in original. See also Brewer 1999, pp. 149 – 152.

In a note attached to the reference to valid reasoning, Brewer writes “I intend ‘validity’ to be interpreted very widely, to capture the correctness or acceptability of inductive and abductive reasoning as well as formal deductive validity.”<sup>17</sup>

The Inference Argument begins with the claim that experiences provide reasons for beliefs, and Brewer insists that these reasons are reasons of a specific kind: reasons for the subject or the subject’s own reasons. For lack of a better term, let’s call reasons of this kind “subjective reasons.” With this terminology in hand, we can formally express the argument as follows:

#### The Inference Argument

1. Experiences provide subjective reasons for beliefs.
2. If an experience provides a subjective reason for a belief, then the experiential content is a premise proposition in a valid or strong inference with the belief content as the conclusion.
3. If an experiential content is a premise proposition in an inference, then the experiential content is conceptual.
4. Therefore, experiences have conceptual contents.

I believe that the earlier quotes from Brewer make it clear that he affirms the first and second premises of this argument, but it may not be so clear that he affirms the third premise. Other parts of his writings indicate that he does. He defines a conceptual content as one that is “characterizable only in terms of concepts which the subject himself must possess and which is of a form which enables it to serve as a premise or the conclusion of a deductive argument, or of an inference of some other kind (e.g. inductive or abductive),” and he defines a conceptual mental state as one with a conceptual content.<sup>18</sup> Later, in a discussion of the

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<sup>17</sup> Brewer 2005, p. 219, n. 6. See also Brewer 1999, p. 151, n. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Brewer 1999, p. 149.

Inference Argument, he describes a case in which a subject has a subjective reason for a belief, and is therefore required to be in a mental state with a content appropriately related to a premise proposition in a valid or strong inference with the belief content as the conclusion. He writes "... the claim that the representational content of the required mental state is (identical to) the premise proposition ... just is the claim that the subject has to have all the concepts constitutive of this proposition, which is what is required to make the final connection between his having the reason in question and my definition of a conceptual mental state."<sup>19</sup>

In order to evaluate the Inference Argument, we need to draw three distinctions. The first distinction is between two ways of understanding the notions of conceptuality and non-conceptuality, the second between two ways of understanding the notion of a proposition, and the third between two ways of understanding the notion of an inference. The Inference Argument tries to establish conceptualism by connecting experiences with subjective reasons, connecting subjective reasons with propositions and inferences, and connecting propositions and inferences with conceptuality. The problem with the argument is that one or the other of the latter two connections breaks down under scrutiny. But which one breaks down, and how, depends on how we understand the notions of conceptuality, a proposition, and an inference. Let's look at the distinctions associated with these three notions in turn.

The first distinction is one that we have already drawn, at least tacitly. It is a distinction between an absolute understanding of conceptuality and non-conceptuality and a relative understanding. According to the absolute understanding, conceptuality and non-conceptuality are properties contents have absolutely and relative to nothing else. According to the relative understanding, conceptuality and non-conceptuality are properties contents

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<sup>19</sup> Brewer 1999, p. 153.

have only relative to mental states of which they are contents. An ascription of conceptuality or non-conceptuality to a content must always specify a mental state relative to which the property is instantiated, though this specification may be tacit and determined by the context of the ascription. Roughly speaking, what makes a content conceptual relative to a mental state is the fact that the mental state has the content and captures it with concepts. What makes a content non-conceptual relative to a mental state is the fact that the mental state has the content but does not capture it with concepts. A single content can be conceptual relative to one mental state and non-conceptual relative to another mental state. We can broaden the relative understanding of conceptuality a bit by allowing contents to count as conceptual relative to linguistic vehicles of content. A content is conceptual relative to a linguistic vehicle of content if and only if the vehicle has the content and captures it with words expressing concepts. Corresponding to our talk of absolute conceptuality and non-conceptuality, we can define theses of absolute conceptualism and absolute non-conceptualism. Absolute conceptualism is the thesis that experiential contents are absolutely conceptual, and absolute non-conceptualism is the thesis that experiential contents are absolutely non-conceptual. Likewise, we can define relative conceptualism as the thesis that experiential contents are relatively conceptual, and relative non-conceptualism as the thesis that experiential contents are relatively non-conceptual.

The second distinction is between two ways of understanding the notion of a proposition. There is an ordinary, non-technical understanding and a technical, philosophical understanding. On the ordinary understanding, propositions are more or less the same things as declarative sentences, and they have conceptual contents. On the philosophical understanding, propositions are contents of a certain kind—the kind that ordinary

propositions have. To say that philosophical propositions are contents of the kind that ordinary propositions have is only to say the every ordinary proposition has a philosophical proposition as its content; it is not to say that every philosophical proposition is the content of some actual or possible ordinary proposition. The class of philosophical propositions can include and extend beyond the class of contents of actual and possible ordinary propositions. A philosophical proposition that is not the content of any actual or possible ordinary proposition need not be absolutely or relatively conceptual.

The third distinction is between two ways of understanding the notion of an inference. There is a logical understanding and a psychological understanding. A logical inference is a set of two or more (philosophical) propositions, with one designated as the conclusion and the rest designated as the premises. Logical inferences are the immediate bearers of logical properties like validity and strength. A psychological inference is a mental state or mental event. It is a kind of mental transition from one set of mental states to another mental state. We can call the members of the set of mental states from which the transition occurs the “premise states” and the mental state to which the transition occurs the “conclusion state.” The premise states and conclusion states of psychological inferences are typically thought of as beliefs, but they do not have to be. In hypothetical reasoning, one can assume something for the sake of discussion and infer something else from it, without believing either the premise or the conclusion of the inference. A psychological inference has a logical inference as a content. The premise states have the premises of the logical inference as contents, and the conclusion state has the conclusion of the logical inference as a content. Psychological inferences bear logical properties like validity and strength mediately, in virtue of having contents that are logical inferences with these properties. The contents of psychological



inferences, premise states, and conclusion states are all conceptual. While every psychological inference has a logical inference as its content, it need not be the case that every logical inference is the content of some actual or possible psychological inference. The class of logical inferences can include and extend beyond the class of actual and possible contents of psychological inferences. A logical inference that is not the content of any actual or possible psychological inference need not be absolutely or relatively conceptual. By the same token, a premise or conclusion in a logical inference need not be the content of any actual or possible premise state or conclusion state, and need not be absolutely or relatively conceptual.

We need to state explicitly that experiences cannot be premise states in psychological inferences. We do not infer beliefs—or anything else—from experiences in the same way that we infer beliefs from other beliefs. To say that we do is to abuse the language. We base beliefs directly on experiences, and while this basing is a kind of mental transition, it is not the same thing as inferring. I acknowledge that there is a sense in which we can infer beliefs from experiences. One can know that one has a certain experience and infer a belief from this knowledge. One might know that one has an experience of a pink elephant and infer from this knowledge the belief that one has been drugged. According to an old epistemological paradigm that has gone out of fashion, all or most of our empirical beliefs are inferred from our experiences in this way. This kind of inference of a belief from an experience is not a psychological inference with an experience as a premise state. It is a psychological inference with knowledge of an experience as a premise state. My denial that experiences can be premise states in psychological inferences is not based on the presupposition that experiential contents are non-conceptual. Even if we suppose that experiential contents are conceptual, it

still seems wrong to say that we infer beliefs from experiences in the same way that we infer beliefs from other beliefs.

For each of the three notions of conceptuality, a proposition, and an inference, there are two ways of understanding it. Each of these notions appears twice in the Inference Argument. Assuming that the argument is free of equivocation, the argument admits of eight different interpretations. The two that are easiest to deal with are those on which propositions are understood as philosophical propositions and inferences are understood as logical inferences. On these interpretations there is no reason to accept the third premise, which is “If an experiential content is a premise proposition in an inference, then the experiential content is conceptual.” We already said that a philosophical proposition need not be the content of any actual or possible ordinary proposition, and therefore need not be absolutely or relatively conceptual. And we also already said that a premise in a logical inference need not be the content of any actual or possible premise state, and therefore need not be absolutely or relatively conceptual.

Consider next the interpretation on which conceptuality is understood as absolute conceptuality, propositions are understood as philosophical propositions, and inferences are understood as psychological inferences. We can make this interpretation more explicit by rewriting the argument as follows:

#### The Inference Argument

1. Experiences provide subjective reasons for beliefs.
2. If an experience provides a subjective reason for a belief, then the experiential content is a philosophical proposition and the content of a premise state in a valid or strong, actual or possible, psychological inference with the belief content as the content of the conclusion state.

3. If an experiential content is a philosophical proposition and the content of a premise state in an actual or possible psychological inference, then the experiential content is absolutely conceptual.

4. Therefore, experiences have absolutely conceptual contents.

Given our earlier observation that the contents of premise states in psychological inferences are conceptual, the second premise of this argument begs the question against the absolute non-conceptualist.

Consider next the interpretation on which conceptuality is understood as absolute conceptuality, propositions are understood as ordinary propositions, and inferences are understood as logical inferences. This interpretation has essentially the same problem as the preceding one. We can make the interpretation more explicit by rewriting the argument as follows:

#### The Inference Argument

1. Experiences provide subjective reasons for beliefs.

2. If an experience provides a subjective reason for a belief, then the experiential content is the content of an actual or possible ordinary proposition and a premise in a valid or strong logical inference with the belief content as the conclusion.

3. If an experiential content is the content of an actual or possible ordinary proposition and a premise in a logical inference, then the experiential content is absolutely conceptual.

4. Therefore, experiences have absolutely conceptual contents.

Given our earlier observation that the contents of ordinary propositions are conceptual, the second premise of this argument begs the question against the absolute non-conceptualist.

Consider next the interpretation on which conceptuality is understood as relative conceptuality, propositions are understood as philosophical propositions, and inferences are

understood as psychological inferences. We can make this interpretation more explicit by rewriting the argument as follows:

#### The Inference Argument

1. Experiences provide subjective reasons for beliefs.
2. If an experience provides a subjective reason for a belief, then the experiential content is a philosophical proposition and the content of a premise state in a valid or strong, actual or possible, psychological inference with the belief content as the content of the conclusion state.
3. If an experiential content is a philosophical proposition and the content of a premise state in an actual or possible psychological inference, then the experiential content is relatively conceptual.
4. Therefore, experiences have relatively conceptual contents.

The expression “relatively conceptual,” appearing in both the third premise of this argument and the conclusion, is ambiguous. In the conclusion it has to mean “conceptual relative to the experiences.” In the premise it can mean either “conceptual relative to the experience” or “conceptual relative to the premise state.” If it means the former, there is no reason to believe the premise. If it means the latter, the argument is invalid.

I leave the task of working through the remaining three interpretations as an exercise for the reader. Each one has essentially the same problem as one or more of the interpretations we have already considered.

#### *5. Brewer’s Recognition Argument*

Like the Inference Argument, the Recognition Argument begins with the claim that experiences provide reasons for beliefs, and reasons of a specific kind: reasons for the subject or the subject’s own reasons. Let’s continue to call these reasons “subjective reasons.” The Recognition Argument is based on what Brewer calls the “recognition requirement” for subjective reasons. Brewer states this requirement by writing “... a person’s own reasons for

believing or doing what she does must, in some sense, be *recognizable* by her as such,” and “... reasons for the subject must be recognizable as such, and susceptible to rational scrutiny and evaluation *by her*.”<sup>20</sup> Brewer usually states the requirement in terms of recognizability, but he sometimes formulates it more strongly, in terms of actual recognition. For instance, he writes “... if a person’s reasons are to be cited as *her reasons* for believing or doing what she does, then she necessarily recognizes them as such.”<sup>21</sup> Thus it seems that the recognition requirement, as Brewer intends it, requires the actual recognition of subjective reasons as such. Brewer gives three distinct arguments for the recognition requirement.<sup>22</sup> None of these arguments are simple or straightforward, and examining all of them in detail would take us far afield. In order to give some idea of where the requirement comes from, let me briefly mention the main idea of one of the arguments. There is a distinction between thoughts and actions that merely accord with rules, and thoughts and actions that genuinely follow rules. Consider someone who believes “P” and “If P then Q” and then comes to believe “Q.” This person’s thought accords with the inference rule *modus ponens*. However, it need not be the case that the person’s thought genuinely follows the rule. The person could come to believe “Q” adventitiously. Genuine rule-following in this instance is a matter of applying the rule to “P” and “If P then Q” and thereby inferring “Q” from them. Now Brewer writes the following:

... it is central to this distinction, between action in accord with a rule and genuine rule-following, that in the latter case [the person] is guided in making the transition by her recognition of her reason *as a reason for doing so*. Coming to believe

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<sup>20</sup> Brewer 1999, p. 163, italics in original; and Brewer 2005, p. 227, italics in original.

<sup>21</sup> Brewer 1999, p. 166, italics in original.

<sup>22</sup> See Brewer 1999, pp. 164 – 166, for an overview and references.

something *for a reason* in this sense essentially involves some conception of what one is up to in doing so, some sense of why this is the right thing to do.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Brewer has much more to say in defense of the recognition requirement, but I am willing to grant it for the sake of discussion.

What is it for a subject to satisfy the recognition requirement by recognizing a subjective reason for a belief as such? A natural answer is that it is for the subject to know that the reason is a reason for the belief. This piece of knowledge, like all pieces of knowledge, is a belief. And since it is a belief about another belief, it is a second-order belief. We can therefore call this account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement a “second-order” account. Brewer is emphatically opposed to second-order accounts.<sup>24</sup> His stated reason is that they are “subject to all the familiar difficulties facing classical foundationalism.”<sup>25</sup> Classical foundationalism is an epistemological theory that Brewer criticizes at length.<sup>26</sup> Examining the theory and Brewer’s criticisms in detail would take us far afield. In order to give some idea of where Brewer’s opposition to second-order accounts comes from, let me briefly describe one criticism of them. Brewer does not make this criticism explicitly, but it seems to me to be implicit in one of the criticisms he makes of classical foundationalism.<sup>27</sup> The criticism is that second-order accounts lead to an infinite regress. Suppose that a subject has a subjective reason for a belief. In order to satisfy the recognition requirement, the subject must recognize this reason as such. If a second-order account is true, this recognition consists in the knowledge that the reason is a reason for the

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<sup>23</sup> Brewer 1999, pp. 165 – 166, italics in original.

<sup>24</sup> Brewer 1999, pp. 129 – 130; and Brewer 2005, pp. 227 – 229.

<sup>25</sup> Brewer 2005, p. 229.

<sup>26</sup> Brewer 1999, pp. 112 – 130.

<sup>27</sup> The criticism is in Brewer 1999, §4.2.3, esp. on pp. 120 – 121.

belief, or in some other knowledge about the belief. This piece of knowledge is a second-order belief. But since it is knowledge, it must be justified, and a belief is justified only if there is a subjective reason for it. So the subject must have a subjective reason for the second-order belief. The subject must satisfy the recognition requirement with regard to this reason, and doing so requires the subject to know about the second-order belief. This piece of knowledge is a third-order belief. It seems clear that we are caught in an infinite regress. Again, there is much more to say about why Brewer opposes second-order accounts, but I am willing to grant their falsehood for the sake of discussion.

According to Brewer, if second-order accounts of satisfaction of the recognition requirement are false, then there must be a true “first-order” account.<sup>28</sup> He never defines the notion of a first-order account precisely; it seems to be defined only by its contrast with the notion of a second-order account.

Brewer completes the Recognition Argument by presenting what he sees as the only plausible first-order account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement, and by arguing that the account is unavailable to the non-conceptualist. Here is his presentation of what he sees as the only plausible first-order account:

Recall that a conceptual mental state is one whose content is the content of a possible judgment by the subject. Crucially, then, the state is one being in which necessarily involves *understanding* the propositional content of the corresponding judgment. Now, it is a constraint upon a correct account of understanding that it should explain how understanding makes possible the subject’s knowledge of which propositions logically follow from which, in such a way as to open the possibility of extending his knowledge by deductive argument. In other words, understanding a given propositional content is precisely the sort of thing which enables a person to recognize which things follow from it, with a genuine sense of what he is up to in deriving these consequences, and why they are correct. Understanding a proposition in this way is a matter of grasping its truth condition, or condition of correct assertion of some other kind, on the basis of the way in which this is systematically determined by the semantic values of its components and their mode of combination, in such a

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<sup>28</sup> Brewer 1999, p. 130.

way as to make such recognition of its deductive relations with other conceptually structured propositions possible. Now, I have argued that a person has a reason to believe that *p*, say, only in virtue of his being in some mental state suitably related to a proposition which serves as a premise in a valid inference to some other proposition suitably related to *p*, most likely the proposition that *p* itself. In the conceptual case, the premise proposition is precisely the content of the mental state in question, which provides the subject's reason for believing that *p*. Thus, the subject of such a conceptual mental state is necessarily in a position to recognize his reason as such. For he understands its propositional content; and this essentially involves his being in a position to recognize the validity of the inference upon which his thereby having a reason to believe that *p* depends.<sup>29</sup>

Let's call this first-order account the "understanding account." After presenting the understanding account, Brewer states that it is unavailable to the non-conceptualist, and that there appear to be no other plausible first-order accounts. He writes the following:

The situation is more difficult in the case of supposedly non-conceptual reasons. For here mere possession of the mental state involved in having such a 'reason' is explicitly insufficient for the subject's understanding of the proposition whose association with this state grounds its putative status as his reason for doing what he does. Hence any account of his essential recognition of his reason as such which attempts to exploit the connection between understanding and knowledge of what follows from what along the lines suggested above is inapplicable. The only alternative seems to be that he must have some second-order knowledge of the relation between mental states of the type in question and the truth of the belief (or appropriateness, in some sense, of the action) for which he thereby, and only instrumentally, recognizes his having a reason.<sup>30</sup>

We can formally express the Recognition Argument as follows:

#### The Recognition Argument

1. Experiences provide subjective reasons for beliefs.
2. If an experience provides a subjective reason for a belief, then the subject recognizes the experiential reason for the belief as such.
3. If a subject recognizes an experiential reason for a belief as such, then there is a true first-order account of the recognition.

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<sup>29</sup> Brewer 1999, pp. 166 – 167, italics in original. See also Brewer 2005, p. 228.

<sup>30</sup> Brewer 1999, pp. 167 – 168.



4. If a subject recognizes an experiential reason for a belief as such, and there is a true first-order account of the recognition, then the recognition consists in understanding the experiential content.
5. If a subject understands an experiential content, then the experiential content is conceptual.
6. Therefore, experiences have conceptual contents.

The second premise of this argument follows immediately from the recognition requirement. The third premise follows from the falsehood of second-order accounts of satisfaction of the recognition requirement, together with Brewer's assertion that there must be a true first-order account if second-order accounts are false. The argument for the fourth premise is that the understanding account is the only plausible first-order account.

As we just said, Brewer supports the third premise by asserting that there must be a true first-order account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement if second-order accounts are false. There seems to be no good reason to accept this assertion. Even if the recognition requirement is often satisfied, it could simply be the case that there is no true account of the satisfaction (apart from trivial "accounts" like the claim that what it is to satisfy the recognition requirement is to satisfy the recognition requirement). Consider an analogy. Lewis Carroll's story of the Tortoise and Achilles shows that inference rules are not premises.<sup>31</sup> The "premise account" of inference rules is false. It does not follow that there must be some other account of inference rules. It could simply be the case that premises are one thing, inference rules are another thing, and there's no more to be said about either of them. Likewise, it could simply be the case that beliefs are one thing, recognition of subjective reasons for beliefs as such is another thing, and there's no more to be said about either of them.

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<sup>31</sup> Carroll 1895.

One possible reply to this criticism is that the existence of a true account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement follows from the widely held thesis of naturalism in the philosophy of mind. Roughly speaking, naturalism says that minds and mental states do not belong to the fundamental furniture of the universe, and that the mental can be exhaustively reduced to the non-mental. Since recognition is a mental state, naturalism implies that there exists a true account, in purely non-mental terms, of satisfaction of the recognition requirement. Brewer would not be wise to make this reply appealing to naturalism. For an account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement in purely non-mental terms would be first-order, distinct from the understanding account, and available to the non-conceptualist. The final stages of the Recognition Argument turn on the contentions that the understanding account is the only plausible first-order account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement, and that the understanding account is unavailable to the non-conceptualist. Therefore, the reply appealing to naturalism would undercut the Recognition Argument.

Brewer supports the third premise by asserting that there must be a true first-order account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement if second-order accounts are false. The criticism we are considering counters that there could simply be no true account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement. Another possible reply to this criticism would be to concede it and to recast the Recognition Argument. According to the recast version of the argument, the existence of a true account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement is not necessary, but it is possible. Moreover, a plausible account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement is “theoretically desirable,” in the sense that it would be illuminating and would improve our understanding. The difference between conceptualism and non-conceptualism is

that the conceptualist has a plausible account to offer—the understanding account—while the non-conceptualist does not. The only account the non-conceptualist has to offer is second-order, but, we are granting, second-order accounts are false. Conceptualism can illuminate satisfaction of the recognition requirement while non-conceptualism cannot. This difference does not prove conceptualism with certainty, but it does give us a reason to prefer conceptualism over non-conceptualism.

This recast version of the Recognition Argument turns on the claim that the understanding account does a better job of illuminating satisfaction of the recognition requirement than any account the non-conceptualist can offer. I submit that this claim is false. To see why, let's first look more closely at the understanding account. According to the understanding account, what it is to recognize an experiential reason for a belief as such is to understand the experiential content. Brewer develops the account by saying that understanding the experiential content puts the subject in a position to recognize its inferential relations with the belief content, and that to be in this position is to be in a position to recognize the experiential reason as such. No doubt philosophers will differ in their judgments of how illuminating this account is. My own judgment is that it is not very illuminating. The main reason is that I find talk of understanding an experiential content—or any content—very awkward. It seems to me that when we use the transitive verb “understand” in ordinary speech, we use it to describe a relationship between a person and a vehicle of content, such as a sentence. It is very natural to think that what it is to understand a sentence is to know what it means, and that to know what it means is to know what content it has. If this is the right way to think about understanding in general, then it makes no sense to speak of understanding a content. And even if understanding a vehicle of content is not a

matter of knowing what content it has, to speak of understanding a content still seems as awkward as to speak of understanding a rock or a tree. I am not saying that talk of understanding an experiential content is nonsensical. A number of interpretations of such talk suggest themselves. The understanding might consist in knowing what content the experience has, or in being in a state of understanding with the same content as the experience. These interpretations require further development, but in each case there is the danger that the developed interpretation will render some of the claims in the understanding account implausible (or make the understanding account available to the non-conceptualist). Until this issue is resolved, I cannot find much illumination in the understanding account.

Now imagine a different first-order account of satisfaction of the recognition requirement. This account is structurally similar to the understanding account, but where the understanding account speaks of understanding an experiential content, this account speaks of discerning an experiential content. And where the understanding account speaks of inferential relations, this account speaks of evidential relations. According to this “discernment account,” what it is to recognize an experiential reason for a belief as such is to discern the experiential content. We can develop the account by saying that discerning the experiential content puts the subject in a position to recognize its evidential relations with the belief content, and that to be in this position is to be in a position to recognize the experiential reason as such. The image to have in mind is a detective at a crime scene, discerning a footprint and recognizing it as evidence that a certain suspect committed the crime. Talk of discerning an experiential content is awkward, I acknowledge. But I find it no more awkward than talk of understanding an experiential content. As with talk of understanding an experiential content, a number of interpretations of talk of discerning an

experiential content suggest themselves. The discernment might consist in introspecting the content, or in being in a state of discernment with the same content as the experience. These interpretations require further development, and in each case there is the danger that the developed interpretation will render some of the claims in the discernment account implausible. Until this issue is resolved, I cannot find much illumination in the discernment account. But I find no less illumination in it than I find in the understanding account. And it seems plain that the discernment account is available to the non-conceptualist. The fifth premise of the original Recognition Argument is “If a subject understands an experiential content, then the experiential content is conceptual.” Whatever plausibility this premise has, the claim “If a subject discerns an experiential content, then the experiential content is conceptual” seems to have none. Thus it seems that non-conceptualism can illuminate satisfaction of the recognition requirement just as well as conceptualism, and that the recast version of the Recognition Argument is unpersuasive.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **A NEW ARGUMENT FOR CONCEPTUALISM**

The conceptualist faces two general tasks. The first is to rebut all the arguments that have been made in favor of non-conceptualism. Call this the “negative task” for conceptualism. The second task is to argue for conceptualism. Call this the “positive task” for conceptualism. Obviously, there are corresponding negative and positive tasks for non-conceptualism. And, equally obviously, the negative task for conceptualism is in direct conflict with the positive task for non-conceptualism, and the positive task for conceptualism is in direct conflict with the negative task for non-conceptualism.

I believe that Part II of this dissertation made substantial progress on the negative task for conceptualism. There I tried to rebut some of the most salient and strongest arguments for non-conceptualism. I acknowledge that I did not address every non-conceptualist argument that has been made. The sheer quantity of published non-conceptualist arguments makes it difficult to complete the negative task for conceptualism in a single work. Nevertheless, I hope that the progress I have made suggests that the prospects for completing the negative task are good, or at least not bad. In the last chapter I examined the best known arguments for conceptualism, all of which are epistemological arguments concerning the justification of empirical beliefs by experiences. I tried to show that all of these epistemological arguments are unconvincing. In this chapter I discuss the prospects for completing the positive task for conceptualism without relying on epistemological arguments. I propose a non-epistemological argument that I acknowledge to be incomplete at the present time, and I

suggest how conceptualists might go about completing it in the future. I hope it emerges that the prospects for completing this argument, and rendering it persuasive, are good, or at least not bad.

Let's begin by modifying our terminology a bit. Up until now I have been using the term "content" in such a way that each experience counts as having exactly one content. The proper parts of contents I have been referring to simply as "parts of contents," not allowing them to count as contents in their own right. Redness has been a part of the content of a visual experience of a red round tomato. In this chapter I switch to terminology according to which what I have been calling a "proper part of a content" counts as a content in its own right. From here on out, redness is a content of a visual experience of a red round tomato.

With this terminological adjustment in place, I wish to call attention to a logical asymmetry between the theses of conceptualism and non-conceptualism. The former makes a universal claim while the latter makes an existential claim. Conceptualism says that all experiential contents are conceptual. Non-conceptualism says that some experiential contents are non-conceptual. We can, if we like, distinguish between what we might call "strong conceptualism" and "weak conceptualism." Strong conceptualism is what is usually called "conceptualism" without qualification. Weak conceptualism is the thesis that some experiential contents are conceptual. We can also distinguish between "strong non-conceptualism" and "weak non-conceptualism." Strong non-conceptualism is the thesis that all experiential contents are non-conceptual. Weak non-conceptualism is what is usually called "non-conceptualism" without qualification. The logical asymmetry is that "conceptualism" means "strong conceptualism" while "non-conceptualism" means "weak non-conceptualism." This asymmetry would lead one to expect that the positive task for

conceptualism is much more difficult than the positive task for non-conceptualism. To establish conceptualism, one must prove that all experiential contents without exception are conceptual. To establish non-conceptualism, one need only identify a single experiential content that one can prove to be non-conceptual. This expectation is vindicated by the literature on conceptualism and non-conceptualism, which contains a plethora of arguments for non-conceptualism, but hardly any arguments for conceptualism.

The thesis of weak conceptualism—that some experiential contents are conceptual—is largely ignored in the literature. When it does come up, one gets the sense that philosophers of perception are generally friendly towards it, or at least not hostile. The friendly attitude is exemplified by the third chapter of Christopher Peacocke's 1992 book, *A Study of Concepts*. This chapter of Peacocke's is something of a non-conceptualist manifesto. In it Peacocke provides an exceptionally thoughtful and detailed elaboration and defense of the non-conceptualist position. One theme running throughout the text is a whole-hearted embrace of weak conceptualism. This embrace manifests itself at numerous points in the text, but I wish to draw attention to three passages that evince Peacocke's acceptance, not just of weak conceptualism, but also of a particular argument for it.

In the first passage, which is very brief, Peacocke says of his own view that "it should ... insist on the partially conceptual character of the perceptual content when one sees something to be a dog or a tree."<sup>1</sup> The second passage is this:

In Evans's work ..., experiences are conceived of as not having a conceptual content at all.... This part of Evans's conception is not obviously obligatory. There is no good reason for denying the overwhelmingly plausible view that we see things as trees or hear a sound as that of a car approaching.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Peacocke 1992, p. 88.



The third passage is this:

Once a thinker has acquired a perceptually individuated concept, his possession of that concept can causally influence what contents his experiences possess. If this were not so, we would be unable to account for differences which manifestly exist. One such difference, for example, is that between the experience of a perceiver completely unfamiliar with Cyrillic script seeing a sentence in that script and the experience of one who understands a language written in that script. These two perceivers see the same shapes at the same positions. ... The experiences differ in that the second perceiver recognizes the symbols as of particular orthographic kinds, and sequences of the symbols as of particular semantic kinds. The questions of the nature of this difference and, more generally, of what constitutionally makes an experience have a conceptual content remain as urgent and open as ever.<sup>3</sup>

As I said, these passage evince Peacocke's acceptance, not just of weak conceptualism, but also of a certain argument for it. We can make this argument more explicit. To do so, let's borrow some terminology from Tim Bayne and speak of a distinction between "low-level" properties and "high-level" properties.<sup>4</sup> We will make no effort to define this distinction precisely, but we will indicate its meaning with examples. With regard to vision, low-level properties include shapes, colors, locations, and motions. High-level properties include doghood, treehood, carhood, and the orthographic and semantic properties instantiated by Cyrillic script. Using this terminology, we can express Peacocke's argument as an argument with two premises:

#### Peacocke's Argument

1. Some experiential contents are high-level.
2. All high-level experiential contents are conceptual.
3. Therefore, some experiential contents are conceptual.

Bayne refers to proponents of this argument's first premise as "liberals" and to opponents as "conservatives." Hence, we can call the first premise "liberalism." For lack of a better name,

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<sup>3</sup> Peacocke 1992, pp. 89 – 90.

<sup>4</sup> Bayne 2009.

we can call the second premise “high-level conceptuality.” The conclusion is, of course, weak conceptualism.

Peacocke’s Argument is valid, so the task of evaluating it comes down to the task of evaluating its premises. The first premise is liberalism, and it is certainly controversial. Nevertheless, many philosophers of perception find it *prima facie* plausible, and liberals have marshaled more than one argument in its favor.<sup>5</sup> The second premise is high-level conceptuality, and it is little discussed. Nevertheless, it seems that many philosophers of perception find it *prima facie* plausible. Peacocke seems to take it for granted in the passages quoted above. Susanna Siegel speaks in passing of an “implicit assumption” among philosophers of perception that all high-level contents are conceptual.<sup>6</sup> And, in the course of making an argument unrelated to Peacocke’s Argument, Bayne instructs us to “Suppose, as many do, that high-level perception is conceptual.”<sup>7</sup>

It would be rash to conclude outright that Peacocke’s Argument is sound. It needs more discussion. The debate over liberalism is ongoing, and high-level conceptuality has received hardly any philosophical scrutiny. Nevertheless, I believe that we can say that Peacocke’s Argument is a respectable argument that may very well be sound. The prospects for defending its soundness are good, or at least not bad.

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<sup>5</sup> For two recent and distinct defenses of liberalism, see Siegel 2006 and Bayne 2009. Bayne’s text provides an excellent introduction to the issue, and his footnotes provide an excellent bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Siegel refers to high-level properties as “K-properties” and to liberalism as “Thesis K.” She writes: “According to some philosophers, subjects can sensorily represent a determinate hue, even when they are not disposed to recognize that hue on subsequent occasions. Experiences of colors are supposed to be the paradigm case of non-conceptual sensory representation. I don’t know of any discussion of the topic that presents a K-property as an example of a property that can figure in what have come to be called ‘non-conceptual contents’ of experience. The argument for Thesis K in this chapter won’t challenge the implicit assumption that K-properties, perhaps unlike some color properties, can be represented in experience only if the subject has *some* sort of disposition to recognize their instances....” (Siegel 2006, p. 486, italics in original.)

<sup>7</sup> Bayne 2009, p. 404.

The conclusion of Peacocke's Argument is weak conceptualism, which is, of course, not what we're interested in. We're discussing the prospects for arguing for strong conceptualism. However, I believe that Peacocke's Argument gives us a basis for constructing an argument for strong conceptualism. The next step in the construction is to modify Peacocke's Argument slightly. Here is the modified argument:

Peacocke's Argument

1. Many experiential contents are high-level.
2. All high-level experiential contents are conceptual.
3. Therefore, many experiential contents are conceptual.

In this argument, the second premise—high-level conceptuality—is unchanged. The conclusion is strengthened, and the first premise is strengthened in a corresponding way that preserves validity. For lack of better names, let's call the conclusion "intermediate conceptualism" and the first premise "strengthened liberalism." Strengthened liberalism is, logically speaking, strictly stronger than liberalism. Nevertheless, I doubt that anyone would accept liberalism without also accepting strengthened liberalism. Recall the high-level properties mentioned in Peacocke's expressions of Peacocke's Argument: doghood, treehood, carhood, and the orthographic and semantic properties instantiated by Cyrillic script. These properties seem to be arbitrarily selected representatives of a large and diverse group of high-level properties; and it is reasonable to suppose that all or most of the members of this group are experiential contents if any of them are. Therefore, strengthened liberalism is as plausible, or nearly as plausible, as liberalism; and the prospects for defending the soundness of the modified version of Peacocke's Argument are as good, or nearly as good, as the prospects for defending the soundness of the original version.

The conclusion of the modified version of Peacocke's Argument is intermediate conceptualism—the thesis that many experiential contents are conceptual. I now wish to suggest that we can move from this thesis to strong conceptualism via induction. The standard example of an inductive argument is the following:

#### The Ravens Argument

1. Many ravens are black.
2. No ravens are known to be non-black.
3. Therefore, all ravens are black.

We can call the first premise of this argument the “positive” premise and the second premise the “negative” premise. The parallel argument I am suggesting is this:

#### The Inductive Conceptualist Argument

1. Many experiential contents are conceptual.
2. No experiential contents are known to be non-conceptual.
3. Therefore, all experiential contents are conceptual.

Again, we can call the first premise of this argument, which is just intermediate conceptualism, the “positive” premise; and we can call the second premise the “negative” premise.

In evaluating the Inductive Conceptualist Argument, the first thing to focus on is the negative premise. This premise directly corresponds to what I have called the “negative task” for conceptualism, *i.e.*, the task of rebutting all the arguments that have been made in favor of non-conceptualism. The negative premise will be established as true if and only if the negative task is completed satisfactorily. I began this chapter by expressing my hope that the progress I have made on the negative task suggests that the prospects for completing it are

good, or at least not bad. Accordingly, I hope that the progress in question suggests that the prospects for establishing the truth of the negative premise are good, or at least not bad.

In the remainder of this chapter, I am going to consider and reply to seven different objections to the Inductive Conceptualist Argument. In some cases my reply will be incomplete, but I hope that in these cases what I have to say will suggest that the prospects for completing the reply satisfactorily are good, or at least not bad.

**First Objection:** The Inductive Conceptualist Argument is modeled on the Ravens Argument, but the Ravens Argument is faulty. In particular, its negative premise—that no ravens are known to be non-black—is false. There are known to be albino ravens and bleached ravens (or so we may suppose for the sake of discussion).

**Reply to First Objection:** Let's grant for the sake of discussion that there are known to be albino ravens and bleached ravens, and that the negative premise of the Ravens Argument is false. It does not follow that the Ravens Argument is faulty in a way that matters for present purposes. All that matters for present purposes is that the inference in the Ravens Argument is strong, not that all the premises are true. And most philosophers grant that the inference is strong.

**Second Objection:** Even if we grant that there are known to be albino ravens and bleached ravens, it doesn't follow that the Ravens Argument is faulty in any way at all. For the conclusion of the Ravens Argument contains a tacit "*ceteris paribus*" clause excluding such non-black ravens from the scope of the conclusion. Since the Inductive Conceptualist Argument is modeled on the Ravens Argument, we may presume that the conclusion of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument also contains a tacit "*ceteris paribus*" clause. Now the problem is that conceptualism is usually understood not as the thesis that all experiential

contents are conceptual *ceteris paribus*, but as the stronger thesis that all experiential contents are conceptual without qualification. Hence, the conclusion of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument is weaker than conceptualism as it is usually understood.

**Reply to Second Objection:** The problem with this objection is the step from the observation that the Inductive Conceptualist Argument is modeled on the Ravens Argument to the presumption that the conclusion of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument contains a tacit “*ceteris paribus*” clause. Using one argument as a model for another does not require every feature of the first argument to reappear in the second; if it did, the two arguments would be one and the same. There are no “albino” or “bleached” experiential contents, and so no need for a “*ceteris paribus*” clause in the conclusion of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument. The absence of a “*ceteris paribus*” clause in the argument’s conclusion does not seem to be sufficient reason to doubt that the argument inherits the goodness of the Ravens Argument on which it is modeled.

**Third Objection:** Induction is legitimate only when applied to empirical data, like the blackness of ravens. Induction is illegitimate when applied to *a priori* data, like the conceptuality of experiential contents. Therefore, the Inductive Conceptualist Argument is no good.

**Reply to Third Objection:** Let’s grant that the Inductive Conceptualist Argument is based on *a priori* data. It’s hard to see why it should follow that the argument applies induction illegitimately. Perhaps it just seems “funny” to apply induction to *a priori* data. If so, then we may be able to dispel the worry by looking at applications of induction in mathematics. I’m not talking about the mathematical proof technique called “mathematical induction.” That technique is actually a form of deduction. I’m talking about uses of

induction, as opposed to deduction, in mathematics. Goldbach's conjecture states that every even integer greater than two can be expressed as the sum of two prime numbers. This conjecture is unproved, but computers have verified it for a huge number of instances, and no counter-instance has ever been discovered. These facts seem to give us some reason to believe Goldbach's conjecture, even if they fall short of a proof conferring certainty. Hence, it appears to be legitimate to apply induction to *a priori* data.

**Fourth Objection:** The Inductive Conceptualist Argument unjustifiably overgeneralizes. The data on which it is ultimately based are conceptual experiential contents, but they are all *adult human* conceptual experiential contents. The only conclusion these data support is the conclusion that all adult human experiential contents are conceptual, and this conclusion is much weaker than the conceptualist thesis as it is usually understood. A large number of black ravens supports the conclusion that all ravens are black, but not the conclusion that all birds are black.

**Reply to Fourth Objection:** The point about all birds being black is specious. Many birds are known to be non-black, and that's why we can't reason from a large number of black ravens to the conclusion that all birds are black. The problem lies with the inductive argument's negative premise, not with the relation between its positive premise and its conclusion. The question we need to ask is this: If no birds were known to be non-black, would a large number of black ravens support the conclusion that all birds are black? The conceptualist might hold that it would; at the same time, the conceptualist might allow that a large number of black ravens would more strongly support the weaker conclusion that all ravens are black. Likewise, assuming the truth of the negative premise of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument, the conceptualist might hold that the data on which the argument

ultimately rests support the conclusion that all experiential contents are conceptual; at the same time, the conceptualist might allow that these data more strongly support the weaker conclusion that all adult human experiential contents are conceptual.

The objection we are considering seems to rest on a principle of “minimal generalization.” Roughly speaking, this principle states that a fact about all the data in a set should never be generalized beyond the “smallest” natural kind to which all the data belong. *Prima facie*, the principle of minimal generalization seems no more plausible than a principle of “maximal generalization.” According to this principle, a fact about all the data in a set may be generalized to any natural kind to which all the data belong, so long as there is no known counter-instance to the resulting generalization. The principle of maximal generalization can be supplemented with a principle according to which a given set of data will provide stronger support for “smaller” generalizations from it and weaker support for “larger” generalizations from it. I am suggesting that the conceptualist can reply to the objection we are considering by embracing something like the principle of maximal generalization. However, I acknowledge that the issues here are very difficult, and that the conceptualist needs to say much more to make this reply satisfactory.

**Fifth Objection:** The Inductive Conceptualist Argument unjustifiably overgeneralizes in another way. The data on which the argument is ultimately based are all *high-level* conceptual experiential contents. The only conclusion these data support is the conclusion that all high-level experiential contents are conceptual, and this conclusion is much weaker than the conceptualist thesis as it is usually understood.

**Reply to Fifth Objection:** My reply to the preceding objection applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the present objection. However, this objection gives us an opportunity to think



more deeply about the category of high-level experiential contents. What makes an experiential content high-level? What holds all of the high-level experiential contents together as a unified category? One possible answer is that nothing holds all of the high-level experiential contents together beyond the property of being high-level. High-levelhood is a primitive, undefinable, and irreducible property. Another possible answer is that high-levelhood is definable in terms of something else, and that this something else is conceptuality. This answer can be developed in at least two different ways. The first way simply identifies high-level experiential contents with conceptual experiential contents. According to this view, when we feel inclined to divide experiential contents into two categories, classifying some as low-level and some as high-level, we are simply responding to the fact that some are non-conceptual and some are conceptual. Since it is agreed on all sides that there are some low-level experiential contents, this view immediately implies the falsehood of conceptualism. The second way of defining high-levelhood in terms of conceptuality is to identify high-level experiential contents with something like *evidently* conceptual experiential contents. According to this view, the distinguishing characteristic of high-level experiential contents is some relational, epistemic property, such as the property of being such that it is immediately evident to us that they are conceptual. When we feel inclined to divide experiential contents into two categories, classifying some as low-level and some as high-level, we are simply responding to the fact that some have this relational, epistemic property and some lack it. It is consistent with this view that low-level experiential contents are conceptual, and that their conceptuality is discoverable through some indirect means such as argumentation. No doubt much more can be said about high-levelhood and its relation to conceptuality. For now I simply note that the conceptualist needs to beware of

undertaking any commitments that the non-conceptualist might use to argue for the identification of high-level experiential contents with conceptual experiential contents.

**Sixth Objection:** Conceptualism is usually understood, not simply as the claim that all experiential contents are conceptual, but as the stronger, modal claim that it is necessary that all experiential contents are conceptual. This latter claim does not follow inductively from the two premises of the Inductive Conceptualist Argument, any more than the claim that it is necessary that all ravens are black follows inductively from the two premises of the Ravens Argument.

**Reply to Sixth Objection:** This is a powerful objection. I see two different strategies the conceptualist can pursue in replying to it: “biting the bullet” and “dodging the bullet.”

The first strategy, biting the bullet, is simple. The conceptualist can simply concede that the Inductive Conceptualist Argument establishes conceptualism only as a truth about the actual world. The argument does not establish conceptualism as a truth about all possible worlds. Nevertheless, the conceptualist can insist, this modally modest version of conceptualism is still a very interesting claim, and its establishment is still a very significant achievement.

The idea behind the second strategy, dodging the bullet, is to reformulate the Inductive Conceptualist Argument by replacing the non-modal predicate “experiential content” with the modal predicate “possible experiential content.” The reformulated argument looks like this:

#### The Inductive Conceptualist Argument

1. Many possible experiential contents are conceptual.
2. No possible experiential contents are known to be non-conceptual.

3. Therefore, all possible experiential contents are conceptual.

The conclusion of this argument is equivalent to the claim that it is necessary that all experiential contents are conceptual. The positive premise follows from the original, non-modal positive premise. Completing the negative task for conceptualism would establish the negative premise. Here's why: If we understand conceptualism as the claim that it is necessary that all experiential contents are conceptual, then we should understand non-conceptualism as the claim that it is not necessary that all experiential contents are conceptual. This latter claim is equivalent to the claim that some possible experiential contents are non-conceptual. To complete the negative task for conceptualism would be to rebut all arguments that have been made for this claim, and hence to establish the negative premise.

The main challenge facing the conceptualist who pursues this strategy is the apparent parity of reasoning with a reformulated version of the Ravens Argument. The reformulated argument looks like this:

#### The Ravens Argument

1. Many possible ravens are black.
2. No possible ravens are known to be non-black.
3. Therefore, all possible ravens are black.

The objector will insist that this argument is bad, and that this argument and the reformulated Inductive Conceptualist Argument must stand or fall together. Assuming that the conceptualist accepts that the reformulated Ravens Argument is bad, his or her most plausible tack would seem to be to deny the argument's negative premise—the premise stating that no possible ravens are known to be non-black. The conceptualist could insist that

we can imagine non-black ravens, and that this exercise of imagination gives us the knowledge that there are possible non-black ravens. Of course, the imagined non-black ravens had better not be albino or bleached, for if they were the objector could insist that the argument's conclusion contains a tacit "*ceteris paribus*" clause excluding such non-black ravens from its scope. The conceptualist must say that we can imagine ravens that are non-black in the same way that most actual ravens are black. And the conceptualist must also insist that experiential contents and conceptuality are unlike ravens and blackness in this regard.

Obviously the strategy of dodging the bullet raises some extremely difficult issues. In addition to those already mentioned, the objector might insist that it is illegitimate to apply induction to modal data, or that the strategy unjustifiably overgeneralizes. The conceptualist who pursues this strategy has a lot of work left to do. But to my mind, the odds that it can all be done satisfactorily are at least as good as the odds that it cannot.

**Seventh Objection:** The Inductive Conceptualist Argument must be flawed because it is too simple and its conclusion is too substantial and controversial. It is impossible to believe that philosophers of perception could have overlooked such an argument for so long if it were probative. Therefore, the argument must not be probative.

**Reply to Seventh Objection:** The Inductive Conceptualist Argument is the simple tip of an extremely complex iceberg. It will be probative only if the conceptualist can satisfactorily establish the positive premise via Peacocke's Argument or some other argument, satisfactorily establish the negative premise by completing the negative task for conceptualism, and satisfactorily complete the replies to all the objections preceding the present one. None of these tasks are simple. However, I hope that what I have said in this

dissertation suggests that the prospects for completing them, and hence for completing the positive task for conceptualism, are good, or at least not bad.

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